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"I SAY NO"

BY

WILKIE COLLINS

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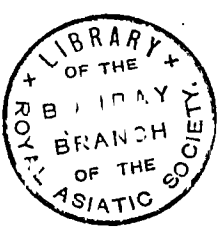

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

London
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
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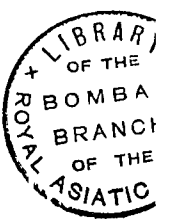
Book the First:

AT SCHOOL

"I SAY NO."

BOOK THE FIRST.

At School.



CHAPTER I.

THE SMUGGLED SUPPER.

OUTSIDE the bedroom the night was black and still.

The small rain fell too softly to be heard in the garden; not a leaf stirred in the airless calm; the watch-dog was asleep, the cats were indoors: far or near, under the murky heaven, not a sound was stirring.

Inside the bedroom the night was black and still.

Miss Ladd knew her business as a school-mistress too well to allow night-lights; and Miss Ladd's young ladies were supposed to be fast asleep, in accordance with the rules of the house. Only at intervals the silence was faintly disturbed, when the restless turning of one of the girls in her bed betrayed itself by a gentle rustling between the sheets. In the long intervals of stillness, not even the softly audible breathing of young creatures asleep was to be heard.

The first sound that told of life and movement revealed the mechanical movement of the clock. Speaking from the lower regions, the tongue of Father Time told the hour before midnight.

A soft voice rose wearily near the door of the room. It counted the strokes of the clock—and reminded one of the girls of the lapse of time.

"Emily! eleven o'clock."

There was no reply. After an interval the weary voice tried again, in louder tones.

"Emily!"

A girl, whose bed was at the inner end of the room, sighed under the heavy heat of the night—and said, in peremptory tones, "Is that Cecilia?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I'm getting hungry, Emily. Is the new girl asleep?"

The new girl answered promptly and spitefully, "No, she isn't."

Having a private object of their own in view, the five wise virgins of Miss Ladd's first class had waited an hour, in wakeful anticipation of the falling asleep of the stranger—and it had ended in this way! A ripple of laughter ran round the room. The new girl, mortified and offended, entered her protest in plain words.

"You are treating me shamefully! You all distrust me, because I am a stranger."

"Say we don't understand you," Emily answered, speaking for her schoolfellows; "and you will be nearer the truth."

"Who expected you to understand me, when I only came here to-day? I have told you already my name is Francine de Sor. If you want to know more, I'm nineteen years old, and I come from the West Indies."

Emily still took the lead. "Why do you come *here?*" she asked. "Who ever heard of a girl joining a new school just before the holidays? You are nineteen years old, are you? I'm a year younger than you—and I have finished my education. The next big girl in the room is a year younger than me—and she has finished her education. What can you possibly have left to learn at your age?"

"Everything!" cried the stranger from the West Indies, with an outburst of tears. "I'm a poor ignorant creature. Your education ought to have taught you to pity me instead of making fun of me. I hate you all. For shame, for shame!"

Some of the girls laughed. One of them —the hungry girl who had counted the strokes of the clock—took Francine's part.

"Never mind their laughing, Miss de Sor. You are quite right, you have good reason to complain of us."

Miss de Sor dried her eyes. "Thank you —whoever you are," she answered, briskly.

"My name is Cecilia Wyvil," the other proceeded. "It was not, perhaps, quite nice of you to say you hated us all. At the same time we have forgotten our good breeding—and the least we can do is to beg your pardon.

This expression of generous sentiment ap-

peared to have an irritating effect on the peremptory young person who took the lead in the room. Perhaps she disapproved of free trade in generous sentiment.

"I can tell you one thing, Cecilia," she said; "you sha'nt beat ME in generosity. Strike a light, one of you, and lay the blame on me if Miss Ladd finds us out. I mean to shake hands with the new girl—and how can I do it in the dark? Miss de Sor, my name's Brown, and I'm queen of the bedroom. I—not Cecilia—offer our apologies if we have offended you. Cecilia is my dearest friend, but I don't allow her to take the lead in the room. Oh, what a lovely night-gown!"

The sudden flow of the candlelight had revealed Francine, sitting up in her bed, and displaying such treasures of real lace over her bosom that the queen lost all sense of royal dignity in irrepressible

admiration. "Seven and sixpence," Emily remarked, looking at her own nightgown, and despising it. One after another, the girls yielded to the attraction of the wonderful lace. Slim and plump, fair and dark, they circled round the new pupil in their flowing white robes, and arrived by common consent at one and the same conclusion: "How rich her father must be!"

Favoured by fortune in the matter of money was this enviable person possessed of beauty as well?

In the disposition of the beds, Miss de Sor was placed between Cecilia on the right hand, and Emily on the left. If, by some fantastic turn of events, a man—say in the interests of propriety, a married doctor, with Miss Ladd to look after him—had been permitted to enter the room, and had been asked what he thought of the girls when he came out, he would not even

have mentioned Francine. Blind to the beauties of the expensive night-gown, he would have noticed her long upper lip, her obstinate chin, her sallow complexion, her eyes placed too close together—and would have turned his attention to her nearest neighbours. On one side, his languid interest would have been instantly roused by Cecilia's glowing auburn hair, her exquisitely pure skin, and her tender blue eyes. On the other, he would have discovered a bright little creature, who would have fascinated and perplexed him at one and the same time. If he had been questioned about her by a stranger, he would have been at a loss to say positively whether she was dark or light: he would have remembered how her eyes had held him, but he would not have known of what colour they were. And yet, she would have remained a vivid picture in his memory when other

impressions, derived at the same time, had vanished. "There was one little witch among them, who was worth all the rest put together; and I can't tell you why. They called her Emily. If I wasn't a married man——" There, he would have thought of his wife, and would have sighed and said no more.

While the girls were still admiring Francine, the clock struck the half-hour past eleven.

Cecilia stole on tiptoe to the door—looked out, and listened—closed the door again—and addressed the meeting with the irresistible charm of her sweet voice and her persuasive smile.

"Are none of you hungry yet?" she enquired. "The teachers are safe in their rooms; we have set ourselves right with Francine. Why keep the supper waiting under Emily's bed?"

Such reasoning as this, with such personal attractions to recommend it, admitted of but one reply. The queen waved her hand graciously, and said "Pull it out."

Is a lovely girl—whose face possesses the crowning charm of expression, whose slightest movement reveals the supple symmetry of her figure—less lovely because she is blessed with a good appetite, and is not ashamed to acknowledge it? With a grace all her own, Cecilia dived under the bed, and produced a basket of jam tarts, a basket of fruit and sweetmeats, a basket of sparkling lemonade, and a superb cake—all paid for by general subscription, and smuggled into the room by kind connivance of the servants. On this occasion, the feast was especially plentiful and expensive in commemoration, not only of the arrival of the Midsummer holidays, but of the coming freedom of Miss Ladd's two leading young

ladies. With widely different destinies before them, Emily and Cecilia had completed their school life, and were now to go out into the world.

The contrast in the characters of the two girls showed itself, even in such a trifle as the preparations for supper.

Gentle Cecilia, sitting on the floor surrounded by good things, left it to the ingenuity of others to decide whether the baskets should be all emptied at once, or handed round from bed to bed, one at a time. In the meanwhile, her lovely blue eyes rested tenderly on the tarts.

Emily's commanding spirit seized on the reins of government, and employed each of her schoolfellows in the occupation which she was fittest to undertake. "Miss de Sor, let me look at your hand. Ah! I thought so. You have got the thickest wrist amongst us; you shall draw the

corks. If you let the lemonade pop, not a drop of it goes down your throat. Effie, Annis, Priscilla, you are three notoriously lazy girls; it's doing you a true kindness to set you to work. Effie, clear the toilette-table for supper; away with the combs, the brushes, and the looking-glass. Annis, tear the leaves out of your book of exercises, and set them out for plates. No! I'll unpack; nobody touches the baskets but me. Priscilla, you have the prettiest ears in the room. You shall act as sentinel, my dear, and listen at the door. Cecilia, when you have done devouring those tarts with your eyes, take that pair of scissors (Miss de Sor, allow me to apologise for the mean manner in which this school is carried on; the knives and forks are counted and locked up every night)—I say take that pair of scissors, Cecilia, and carve the cake, and don't keep the largest bit for yourself.

Are we all ready? Very well. Now take example by me. Talk as much as you like, so long as you don't talk too loud. There is one other thing before we begin. The men always propose toasts on these occasions; let's be like the men. Can any of you make a speech? Ah, it falls on me as usual. I propose the first toast. Down with all schools and teachers—especially the new teacher, who came this half-year. Oh, mercy, how it stings!" The fixed gas in the lemonade took the orator, at that moment, by the throat, and effectually checked the flow of her eloquence. It made no difference to the girls. Excepting the case of feeble stomachs, who cares for eloquence in the presence of a supper-table? There were no feeble stomachs in that bedroom. With what inexhaustible energy Miss Ladd's young ladies ate and drank! How merrily they enjoyed the

delightful privilege of talking nonsense! And—alas! alas!—how vainly they tried, in after life, to renew the once unalloyed enjoyment of tarts and lemonade!

In the unintelligible scheme of creation, there appears to be no human happiness—not even the happiness of school girls—which is ever complete. Just as it was drawing to a close, the enjoyment of the feast was interrupted by an alarm from the sentinel at the door.

"Put out the candle!" Priscilla whispered. "Somebody on the stairs."

CHAPTER II.

BIOGRAPHY IN THE BEDROOM.

THE candle was instantly extinguished. In discreet silence the girls stole back to their beds, and listened.

As an aid to the vigilance of the sentinel, the door had been left ajar. Through the narrow opening, a creaking of the broad wooden stairs of the old house became audible. In another moment there was silence. An interval passed, and the creaking was heard again. This time, the sound was distant and diminishing. On a sudden it stopped. The midnight silence was disturbed no more.

What did this mean?

Had one among the many persons in authority under Miss Ladd's roof heard the girls talking, and ascended the stairs to surprise them in the act of violating one of the rules of the house? So far, such a proceeding was by no means uncommon. But was it within the limits of probability that a teacher should alter her opinion of her own duty half-way up the stairs, and deliberately go back to her own room again? The bare idea of such a thing was absurd on the face of it. What more rational explanation could ingenuity discover on the spur of the moment? Francine was the first to offer a suggestion. She shook and shivered in her bed, and said, "For heaven's sake, light the candle again! It's a Ghost."

"Clear away the supper, you fools, before the ghost can report us to Miss Ladd."

With this excellent advice Emily checked

the rising panic. The door was closed, the candle was lit; all traces of the supper disappeared. For five minutes more they listened again. No sound came from the stairs; no teacher, or ghost of a teacher, appeared at the door.

Having eaten her supper, Cecilia's immediate anxieties were at an end; she was at leisure to exert her intelligence for the benefit of her schoolfellows. In her gentle ingratiating way, she offered a composing suggestion. "When we heard the creaking, I don't believe there was anybody on the stairs. In these old houses there are always strange noises at night—and they say the stairs here were made more than two hundred years since."

The girls looked at each other with a sense of relief—but they waited to hear the opinion of the queen. Emily, as usual, justified the confidence placed in her. She

discovered an ingenious method of putting Cecilia's suggestion to the test.

"Let's go on talking," she said. If Cecilia is right, the teachers are all asleep, and we have nothing to fear from them. If she's wrong, we shall sooner or later see one of them at the door. Don't be alarmed, Miss de Sor. Catching us talking at night, in this school, only means a reprimand. Catching us with a light, ends in punishment. Blow out the candle."

Francine's belief in the ghost was too sincerely superstitious to be shaken: she started up in bed. "Oh, don't leave me in the dark! I'll take the punishment, if we are found out."

"On your sacred word of honour?" Emily stipulated.

"Yes—yes!"

The queen's sense of humour was tickled. "There's something funny," she remarked,

addressing her subjects, "in a big girl like this, coming to a new school, and beginning with a punishment. May I ask if you are a foreigner, Miss de Sor?"

"My papa is a Spanish gentleman," Francine answered, with dignity.

"And your mamma?"

"My mamma is English."

"And you have always lived in the West Indies?"

"I have always lived in the island of St. Domingo."

Emily checked off on her fingers the different points thus far discovered in the character of Mr. de Sor's daughter. "She's ignorant, and superstitious, and foreign, and rich. My dear (forgive the familiarity), you are an interesting girl—and we must really know more of you. Entertain the bedroom. What have you been about all your life? And what, in the name of wonder, brings

you here? Before you begin, I insist on one condition, in the name of all the young ladies in the room. No useful information about the West Indies!"

Francine disappointed her audience.

She was ready enough to make herself an object of interest to her companions; but she was not possessed of the capacity to arrange events in their proper order, necessary to the recital of the simplest narrative. Emily was obliged to help her, by means of questions. In one respect, the result justified the trouble taken to obtain it. A sufficient reason was discovered for the extraordinary appearance of a new pupil, on the day before the school closed for the holidays.

Mr. de Sor's elder brother had left him an estate in San Domingo, and a fortune in money as well; on the one easy condition that he continued to reside in the island. The question of expense being now beneath

the notice of the family, Francine had been sent to England, especially recommended to Miss Ladd as a young lady with grand prospects, sorely in need of a fashionable education. The voyage had been so timed, by the advice of the schoolmistress, as to make the holidays a means of obtaining this object privately. Francine was to be taken to Brighton, where excellent masters could be obtained to assist Miss Ladd. With six weeks before her, she might in some degree make up for lost time; and, when the school opened again, she would avoid the mortification of being put down in the lowest class, along with the children.

The examination of Miss de Sor having produced these results was pursued no further. Her character now appeared in a new, and not very attractive, light. She audaciously took to herself the whole credit of telling her story.

"I think it's my turn now," she said, "to be interested and amused. May I ask you to begin, Miss Emily. All I know of you at present is, that your family name is Brown."

Emily held up her hand for silence.

Was the mysterious creaking on the stairs making itself heard once more? No. The sound that had caught Emily's quick ear came from the beds, on the opposite side of the room, occupied by the three lazy girls. With no new alarm to disturb them, Effie, Annis, and Priscilla had yielded to the composing influences of a good supper and a warm night. They were fast asleep—and the stoutest of the three (softly, as became a young lady) was snoring!

The unblemished reputation of the bedroom was dear to Emily, in her capacity of queen. She felt herself humiliated in the presence of the new pupil.

"If that fat girl ever gets a lover," she said indignantly, "I shall consider it my duty to warn the poor man before he marries her. Her ridiculous name is Euphemiâ. I have christened her (far more appropriately) Boiled Veal. No colour in her hair, no colour in her eyes, no colour in her complexion. In short, no flavour in Euphemia. You naturally object to snoring. Pardon me if I turn my back on you—I am going to throw my slipper at her."

The soft voice of Cecilia—suspiciously drowsy in tone—interposed in the interests of mercy.

"She can't help it, poor thing; and she really isn't loud enough to disturb us."

"She won't disturb *you*, at any rate! Rouse yourself, Cecilia. We are wide awake on this side of the room—and Francine says it's our turn to amuse her."

A low murmur, dying away gently in a

sigh, was the only answer. Sweet Cecilia had yielded to the somnolent influences of the supper and the night. The soft infection of repose seemed to be in some danger of communicating itself to Francine. Her large mouth opened luxuriously in a long-continued yawn.

"Good-night!" said Emily.

Miss de Sor became wide awake in an instant.

"No," she said positively; "you are quite mistaken if you think I am going to sleep. Please exert yourself, Miss Emily—I am waiting to be interested."

Emily appeared to be unwilling to exert herself. She preferred talking of the weather.

"Isn't the wind rising?" she said.

There could be no doubt of it. The leaves in the garden were beginning to rustle, and the pattering of the rain sounded on the windows

Francine (as her straight chin proclaimed to all students of physiognomy) was an obstinate girl. Determined to carry her point, she tried Emily's own system on Emily herself—she put questions.

"Have you been long at this school?"

"More than three years."

"Have you got any brothers and sisters?"

"I am an only child."

"Are your father and mother alive?"

Emily suddenly raised herself in her bed:

"Wait a minute," she said; "I think I hear it again."

"The creaking on the stairs?"

"Yes."

Either she was mistaken, or the change for the worse in the weather made it not easy to hear slight noises in the house. The wind was still rising. The passage of it through the great trees in the garden began to sound like the fall of waves on

a distant beach. It drove the rain—a heavy downpour by this time—rattling against the windows.

"Almost a storm, isn't it?" Emily said.

Francine's last question had not been answered yet. She took the earliest opportunity of repeating it:

"Never mind the weather," she said. "Tell me about your father and mother. Are they both alive?"

Emily's reply only related to one of her parents.

"My mother died before I was old enough to feel my loss."

"And your father?"

Emily referred to another relative—her father's sister.

"Since I have grown up," she proceeded "my good aunt has been a second mother to me. My story is, in one respect, the reverse of yours. You are unexpectedly

rich; and I am unexpectedly poor. My aunt's fortune was to have been my fortune, if I outlived her. She has been ruined by the failure of a bank. In her old age, she must live on an income of two hundred a year—and I must get my own living when I leave school."

"Surely your father can help you?" Francine persisted.

"His property is landed property." Her voice faltered, as she referred to him, even in that indirect manner. "It is entailed; his nearest male relative inherits it."

The delicacy which is easily discouraged was not one of the weaknesses in the nature of Francine."

"Do I understand that your father is dead?" she asked.

Our thick-skinned fellow-creatures have the rest of us at their mercy: only give them time, and they carry their point in

the end. In sad subdued tones—telling of deeply-rooted reserves of feeling, seldom revealed to strangers—Emily yielded at last.

"Yes," she said, "my father is dead."

"Long ago?"

"Some people might think it long ago. I was very fond of my father. It's nearly four years since he died, and my heart still aches when I think of him. I'm not easily depressed by troubles, Miss de Sor. But his death was sudden—he was in his grave when I first heard of it—and——Oh, he was so good to me; he was so good to me!"

The gay high-spirited little creature, who took the lead among them all—who was the life and soul of the school—hid her face in her hands, and burst out crying.

Startled and—to do her justice—ashamed, Francine attempted to make excuses. Emily's generous nature passed over the

cruel persistency that had tortured her. "No, no; I have nothing to forgive. It isn't your fault. Other girls have got mothers and brothers and sisters—and get reconciled to such a loss as mine. Don't make excuses."

"Yes, but I want you to know that I feel for you," Francine insisted, without the slightest approach to sympathy in face, voice, or manner. "When my uncle died, and left us all the money, papa was much shocked. He trusted to time to help him."

"Time has been long about it with me, Francine. I am afraid there is something perverse in my nature; the hope of meeting again in a better world seems so faint and so far away. No more of it now! Let us talk of that good creature who is asleep on the other side of you. Did I tell you that I must earn my own bread when I leave school? Well, Cecilia has written

home and found an employment for me. Not a situation as governess—something quite out of the common way. You shall hear all about it."

In the brief interval that had passed, the weather had begun to change again. The wind was as high as ever; but to judge by the lessening patter on the windows the rain was passing away.

Emily began.

She was too grateful to her friend and schoolfellow, and too deeply interested in her story, to notice the air of indifference with which Francine settled herself on her pillow to hear the praises of Cecilia. The most beautiful girl in the school was not an object of interest to a young lady with an obstinate chin and unfortunately-placed eyes. Pouring warm from the speaker's heart the story ran smoothly on, to the monotonous accompaniment of the moaning

wind. By fine degrees Francine's eyes closed, opened, and closed again. Towards the latter part of the narrative Emily's memory became, for the moment only, confused between two events. She stopped to consider—noticed Francine's silence, in an interval when she might have said a word of encouragement—and looked closer at her. Miss de Sor was asleep.

"She might have told me she was tired," Emily said to herself quietly. "Well! the best thing I can do is to put out the light and follow her example."

As she took up the extinguisher, the bedroom door was suddenly opened from the outer side. A tall woman, robed in a black dressing-gown, stood on the threshold, looking at Emily.

CHAPTER III.

THE LATE MR. BROWN.

THE woman's lean long-fingered hand pointed to the candle.

"Don't put it out." Saying those words, she looked round the room, and satisfied herself that the other girls were asleep.

Emily laid down the extinguisher. "You mean to report us, of course," she said. "I am the only one awake, Miss Jethro; lay the blame on me."

"I have no intention of reporting you. But I have something to say."

She paused, and pushed her thick black hair (already streaked with grey) back

from her temples. Her eyes, large and dark and dim, rested on Emily with a sorrowful interest. "When your young friends wake to-morrow morning," she went on, "you can tell them that the new teacher, whom nobody likes, has left the school."

For once, even quick-witted Emily was bewildered. "Going away," she said, "when you have only been here since Easter!"

Miss Jethro advanced, not noticing Emily's expression of surprise. "I am not very strong at the best of times," she continued, "may I sit down on your bed?" Remarkable, on other occasions, for her cold composure, her voice trembled as she made that request—a strange request surely, when there were chairs at her disposal.

Emily made room for her with the dazed look of a girl in a dream. "I beg your pardon, Miss Jethro, one of the things I can't endure is being puzzled. If you don't

mean to report us, why did you come in and catch me with the light?"

Miss Jethro's explanation was far from relieving the perplexity which her conduct had caused.

"I have been mean enough," she answered, "to listen at the door, and I heard you talking of your father. I want to hear more about him. That is why I came in."

"You knew my father!" Emily exclaimed.

"I believe I knew him. But his name is so common—there are so many thousands of 'James Browns' in England—that I am in fear of making a mistake. I heard you say that he died nearly four years since. Can you mention any particulars which might help to enlighten me? If you think I am taking a liberty——"

Emily stopped her. "I would help you if I could," she said. "But I was in poor health at the time; and I was staying

with friends far away in Scotland, to try change of air. The news of my father's death brought on a relapse. Weeks passed before I was strong enough to travel—weeks and weeks before I saw his grave! I can only tell you what I know from my aunt. He died of heart-complaint."

Miss Jethro started.

Emily looked at her for the first time, with eyes that betrayed a feeling of distrust. "What have I said to startle you?" she asked.

"Nothing! I am nervous in stormy weather —don't notice me." She went on abruptly with her inquiries. "Will you tell me the date of your father's death?"

"The date was the thirtieth of September, nearly four years since."

She waited, after that reply.

Miss Jethro was silent.

"And this," Emily continued, "is the

thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-one. You can now judge for yourself. Did you know my father?"

Miss Jethro answered mechanically, using the same words.

"I did know your father."

Emily's feeling of distrust was not set at rest. "I never heard him speak of you," she said.

In her younger days, the teacher must have been a handsome woman. Her grandly-formed features still suggested the idea of imperial beauty—perhaps Jewish in its origin. When Emily said, "I never heard him speak of you," the colour flew into her pallid cheeks: her dim eyes became alive again with a momentary light. She left her seat on the bed, and, turning away, mastered the emotion that shook her.

"How hot the night is," she said; and

sighed, and resumed the subject with a steady countenance. "I am not surprised that your father never mentioned me—to *you*." She spoke quietly; but her face was paler than ever. She sat down again on the bed. "Is there anything I can do for you," she asked, "before I go away? Oh, I only mean some trifling service that would lay you under no obligation, and would not oblige you to keep up your acquaintance with me."

Her eyes—the dim black eyes that must once have been irresistibly beautiful—looked at Emily so sadly that the generous girl reproached herself for having doubted her father's friend. "Are you thinking of *him*," she said, gently, "when you ask if you can be of service to me?"

Miss Jethro made no direct reply. "You were fond of your father?" she added, in a whisper. "You told your school-

fellow that your heart still aches when you speak of him."

"I only told her the truth," Emily answered, simply.

Miss Jethro shuddered—on that hot night! —shuddered as if a chill had struck her.

Emily held out her hand: the kind feeling that had been roused in her glittered prettily in her eyes. "I am afraid I have not done you justice," she said. "Will you forgive me and shake hands?"

Miss Jethro rose, and drew back. "Look at the light!" she exclaimed.

The candle was all but burnt out. Emily still offered her hand—and still Miss Jethro refused to see it.

"There is just light enough left," she said, "to show me my way to the door. Good-night—and good-bye."

Emily caught at her dress, and stopped

her. "Why won't you shake hands with me?" she asked.

The wick of the candle fell over in the socket, and left them in the dark. Emily resolutely held the teacher's dress. With or without light, she was still bent on making Miss Jethro explain herself.

They had throughout spoken in guarded tones, fearing to disturb the sleeping girls. The sudden darkness had its inevitable effect. Their voices sank to whispers now. "My father's friend," Emily pleaded, "is surely my friend?"

"Drop the subject."

"Why?"

"You can never be *my* friend."

"Why not?"

"Let me go!"

Emily's sense of self-respect forbade her to persist any longer. "I beg your pardon for having kept you here against your

will," she said—and dropped her hold on the dress

Miss Jethro instantly yielded on her side. "I am sorry to have been obstinate," she answered. "If you do despise me, it is after all no more than I have deserved." Her hot breath beat on Emily's face: the unhappy woman must have bent over the bed as she made her confession. "I am not a fit person for you to associate with."

"I don't believe it!"

Miss Jethro sighed bitterly. "Young and warm hearted—I was once like you!" She controlled that outburst of despair. Her next words were spoken in steadier tones. "You *will* have it—you *shall* have it!" she said. "Some one (in this house or out of it; I don't know which) has betrayed me to the mistress of the school. A wretch in my situation suspects everybody, and worse still, does it without

reason or excuse. I heard you girls talking when you ought to have been asleep. You all dislike me. How did I know it mightn't be one of you? Absurd, to a person with a well-balanced mind! I went half-way up the stairs, and felt ashamed of myself, and went back to my room. If I could only have got some rest! Ah, well, it was not to be done. My own vile suspicions kept me awake; I left my bed again. You know what I heard on the other side of that door, and why I was interested in hearing it. Your father never told me he had a daughter. 'Miss Brown,' at this school, was any 'Miss Brown,' to me; I had no idea of who you really were until to-night. I'm wandering. What does all this matter to you? Miss Ladd has been merciful; she lets me go without exposing me. You can guess what has happened. No? Not even yet?

Is it innocence or kindness that makes you so slow to understand? My dear, I have obtained admission to this respectable house by means of false references, and I have been discovered. *Now* you know why you must not be the friend of such a woman as I am! Once more, good-night —and good-bye."

Emily shrank from that miserable fare well. "Bid me good-night," she said "but don't bid me good-bye. Let me s you again."

"Never!"

The sound of the softly-closed door just audible in the darkness. She ha spoken—she had gone—never to be see by Emily again.

Miserable, interesting, unfathomable crea ture—the problem that night of Emily waking thoughts: the phantom of he

dreams. "Bad? or good?" she asked herself. "False; for she listened at the door. True; for she told me the tale of her own disgrace. A friend of my father; and she never knew that he had a daughter. Refined, accomplished, lady-like; and she stoops to use a false reference. Who is to reconcile such contradictions as these?"

Dawn looked in at the window—dawn of the memorable day which was, for Emily, the beginning of a new life. The years were before her; and the years in their course reveal baffling mysteries of life and death.

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CHAPTER IV.

MISS LADD'S DRAWING-MASTER.

FRANCINE was awakened the next morning by one of the housemaids, bringing up her breakfast on a tray. Astonished at this concession to laziness, in an institution devoted to the practice of all the virtues she looked round. The bedroom was deserted.

"The other young ladies are as busy as bees, Miss," the housemaid explained. "They were up and dressed two hours ago: and the breakfast has been cleared away long since. It's Miss Emily's fault. She wouldn't allow them to wake you; she said you could be of no possible use

downstairs, and you had better be treated like a visitor. Miss Cecilia was so distressed at your missing your breakfast that she spoke to the housekeeper, and I was sent up to you. Please to excuse it if the tea's cold. This is Grand Day, and we are all topsy-turvy in consequence."

Inquiring what "Grand Day" meant, and why it produced this extraordinary result in a ladies' school, Francine discovered that the first day of the vacation was devoted to the distribution of prizes, in the presence of parents, guardians, and friends An Entertainment was added, comprising those merciless tests of human endurance called Recitations; light refreshments and musical performances being distributed at intervals, to encourage the exhausted audience. The local newspaper sent a reporter to describe the proceedings, and some of Miss Ladd's young ladies

enjoyed the intoxicating luxury of seeing their names in print.

"It begins at three o'clock," the housemaid went on, "and, what with practising and rehearsing, and ornamenting the schoolroom, there's a hubbub fit to make a person's head spin. Besides which," said the girl, lowering her voice, and approaching a little nearer to Francine, "we have all been taken by surprise. The first thing in the morning Miss Jethro left us, without saying good-bye to anybody."

"Who is Miss Jethro?"

"The new teacher, miss. We none of us liked her, and we all suspect there's something wrong. Miss Ladd and the clergyman had a long talk together yesterday (in private, you know), and they sent for Miss Jethro—which looks bad, doesn't it? Is there anything more I can do for you, miss? It's a beautiful day after the rain

If I was you, I should go and enjoy myself in the garden."

Having finished her breakfast, Francine decided on profiting by this sensible suggestion.

The servant who showed her the way to the garden was not favourably impressed by the new pupil: Francine's temper asserted itself a little too plainly in her face. To a girl possessing a high opinion of her own importance it was not very agreeable to feel herself excluded, as an illiterate stranger, from the one absorbing interest of her schoolfellows. "Will the time ever come," she wondered, bitterly, "when I shall win a prize, and sing and play before all the company? How I should enjoy making the girls envy me!"

A broad lawn, overshadowed at one end by fine old trees—flower beds and shrubberies, and winding paths prettily and

invitingly laid out—made the garden a welcome refuge on that fine summer morning. The novelty of the scene, after her experience in the West Indies, the delicious breezes cooled by the rain of the night, exerted their cheering influence even on the sullen disposition of Francine. She smiled, in spite of herself, as she followed the pleasant paths, and heard the birds singing their summer songs over her head.

Wandering among the trees, which occupied a considerable extent of ground, she passed into an open space beyond, and discovered an old fish-pond, overgrown by aquatic plants. Driblets of water trickled from a dilapidated fountain in the middle. On the farther side of the pond the ground sloped downwards towards the south, and revealed, over a low paling, a pretty view of a village and its church, backed by fir woods mounting the heathy sides of a range

of hills beyond. A fanciful little wooden building, imitating the form of a Swiss cottage, was placed so as to command the prospect. Near it, in the shadow of the building, stood a rustic chair and table—with a colour-box on one, and a portfolio on the other. Fluttering over the grass, at the mercy of the capricious breeze, was a neglected sheet of drawing paper. Francine ran round the pond, and picked up the paper just as it was on the point of being tilted into the water. It contained a sketch in water colours of the village and the woods, Francine had looked at the view itself with indifference—the picture of the view interested her. Ordinary visitors to Galleries of Art, which admit students, show the same strange perversity. The work of the copyist commands their whole attention; they take no interest in the original picture.

Looking up from the sketch, Francine was startled. She discovered a man, at the window of the Swiss summer-house, watching her.

"When you have done with that drawing," he said, quietly, "please let me have it back again."

He was tall and thin and dark. His finely shaped intelligent face—hidden, as to the lower part of it, by a curly black beard—would have been absolutely handsome, even in the eyes of a school-girl, but for the deep furrows that marked it prematurely between the eyebrows, and at the sides of the mouth. In the same way, an underlying mockery impaired the attraction of his otherwise refined and gentle manner. Among his fellow-creatures, children and dogs were the only critics who appreciated his merits, without discovering the defects which lessened the favourable

appreciation of him by men and women. He dressed neatly, but his morning coat was badly made, and his picturesque felt hat was too old. In short, there seemed to be no good quality about him which was not perversely associated with a drawback of some kind. He was one of those harmless and luckless men, possessed of excellent qualities, who fail nevertheless to achieve popularity in their social sphere.

Francine handed his sketch to him, through the window; doubtful whether the words that he had addressed to her were spoken in jest or in earnest.

"I only presumed to touch your drawing," she said, "because it was in danger."

"What danger?" he inquired.

Francine pointed to the pond. "If I had not been in time to pick it up, it would have been blown into the water."

"Do you think it was worth picking up?"

Putting that question, he looked first at the sketch—then at the view which it represented—then back again at the sketch. The corners of his mouth turned upwards with a humorous expression of scorn. "Madam Nature," he said, "I beg your pardon." With those words, he composedly tore his work of art into small pieces, and scattered them out of the window.

"What a pity!" said Francine.

He joined her on the ground outside the cottage. "Why is it a pity?" he asked.

"Such a nice drawing."

"It isn't a nice drawing."

"You're not very polite, sir."

He looked at her—and sighed, as if he pitied so young a woman for having a temper so ready to take offence. In his flattest contradictions he always preserved the character of a politely-positive man.

"Put it in plain words, Miss," he replied.

"I have offended the predominant sense in your nature—your sense of self-esteem. You don't like to be told, even indirectly, that you know nothing of Art. In these days everybody knows everything—and thinks nothing worth knowing after all. But beware how you presume on an appearance of indifference, which is nothing but conceit in disguise. The ruling passion of civilised humanity is, Conceit. You may try the regard of your dearest friend in any other way, and be forgiven. Ruffle the smooth surface of your friend's self-esteem —and there will be an unacknowledged coolness between you which will last for life. Excuse me for giving you the benefit of my trumpery experience. This sort of smart talk is *my* form of conceit. Can I be of use to you in some better way? Are you looking for one of our young ladies?"

Francine began to feel a certain reluc-

tant interest in him when he spoke of "our young ladies." She asked if he belonged to the school.

The corners of his mouth turned up again. "I'm one of the masters," he said. "Are *you* going to belong to the school, too?"

Francine bent her head, with a gravity and condescension intended to keep him at his proper distance. Far from being discouraged, he permitted his curiosity to take additional liberties. "Are you to have the misfortune of being one of my pupils?" he asked.

"I don't know who you are."

"You wont be much wiser when you do know. My name is Alban Morris."

Francine corrected herself. "I mean, I don't know what you teach."

Alban Morris pointed to the fragments of his sketch from Nature. "I am a bad

artist," he said. "Some bad artists become Royal Academicians. Some take to drink. Some get a pension. And some—I am one of them—find refuge in schools. Drawing is an 'Extra' at this school. Will you take my advice? Spare your good father's pocket; say you don't want to learn to draw."

He was so gravely in earnest that Francine burst out laughing. "You are a strange man," she said.

"Wrong again, Miss. I am only an unhappy man."

The furrows in his face deepened, the latent humour died out of his eyes. He turned to the summer-house window, and took up a pipe and tobacco pouch, left on the ledge.

"I lost my only friend last year," he said. "Since the death of my dog, my pipe is the one companion I have left.

Naturally, I am not allowed to enjoy the honest fellow's society in the presence of ladies. They have their own taste in perfumes. Their clothes and their letters reek with the fœtid secretion of the musk deer. The clean vegetable smell of tobacco is unendurable to them. Allow me to retire —and let me thank you for the trouble you took to save my drawing."

The tone of indifference in which he expressed his gratitude piqued Francine. She resented it by drawing her own conclusion from what he had said of the ladies and the musk-deer. "I was wrong in admiring your drawing," she remarked; "and wrong again in thinking you a strange man. Am I wrong, for the third time, in believing that you dislike women?"

"I am sorry to say you are right," Alban Morris answered, gravely.

"Is there not even one exception?"

The instant the words passed her lips, she saw that there was some secretly sensitive feeling in him which she had hurt. His black brows gathered into a frown, his piercing eyes looked at her with angry surprise. It was over in a moment. He raised his shabby hat, and made her a bow.

"There is a sore place still left in me," he said; "and you have innocently hit it. Good morning."

Before she could speak again, he had turned the corner of the summer-house, and was lost to view in a shrubbery on the westward side of the grounds.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERIES IN THE GARDEN.

Left by herself, Miss de Sor turned back again by way of the trees.

So far, her interview with the drawing-master had helped to pass the time. Some girls might have found it no easy task to arrive at a true view of the character of Alban Morris. Francine's essentially superficial observation set him down as "a little mad," and left him there, judged and dismissed to her own entire satisfaction.

Arriving at the lawn, she discovered Emily pacing backwards and forwards, with

her head down and her hands behind her, deep in thought. Francine's high opinion of herself would have carried her past any of the other girls, unless they had made special advances to her. She stopped and looked at Emily.

It is the sad fate of little women in general to grow too fat, and to be born with short legs. Emily's slim finely-strung figure spoke for itself as to the first of these misfortunes, and asserted its happy freedom from the second, if she only walked across a room. Nature had built her, from head to foot, on a skeleton-scaffolding in perfect proportion. Tall or short matters little to the result, in women who possess the first and foremost advantage of beginning well in their bones. When they live to old age, they often astonish thoughtless men, who walk behind them in the street. "I give you my honour, she was as easy

and upright as a young girl; and when you got in front of her and looked—white hair, and seventy years of age!"

Francine approached Emily, moved by a rare impulse in her nature—the impulse to be sociable. "You look out of spirits," she began. "Surely you don't regret leaving school?"

In her present mood, Emily took the opportunity (in the popular phrase) of snubbing Francine. "You have guessed wrong; I do regret," she answered. "I have found in Cecilia my dearest friend, at school. And school brought with it the change in my life which has helped me to bear the loss of my father. If you must know what I was thinking of just now, I was thinking of my aunt. She has not answered my last letter—and I'm beginning to be afraid she is ill."

"I'm very sorry," said Francine.

"Why? You don't know my aunt; and you have only known me, since yesterday afternoon. Why are you sorry?"

Francine remained silent. Without realising it, she was beginning to feel the dominant influence that Emily exercised over the weaker natures that came in contact with her. To find herself irresistibly attracted by a stranger at a new school—an unfortunate little creature, whose destiny was to earn her own living—filled the narrow mind of Miss de Sor with perplexity. Having waited in vain for a reply, Emily turned away, and resumed the train of thought which her schoolfellow had interrupted.

By an association of ideas, of which she was not herself aware, she now passed from thinking of her aunt to thinking of Miss Jethro. The interview of the previous night

had dwelt on her mind at intervals, in the hours of the new day.

Acting on instinct *rather than on reason*, she had kept that remarkable incident in her school life a secret from everyone. No discoveries had been made by other persons. In speaking to her staff of teachers, Miss Ladd had alluded to the affair in the most cautious terms. "Circumstances of a private nature have obliged the lady to retire from my school. When we meet after the holidays, another teacher will be in her place." There, Miss Ladd's explanation had begun and ended. Inquiries addressed to the servants had led to no result. Miss Jethro's luggage was to be forwarded to the London terminus of the railway—and Miss Jethro herself had baffled investigation by leaving the school on foot. Emily's interest in the lost teacher was not the transitory interest of curiosity; her father's mysterious friend was

a person whom she honestly desired to see again. Perplexed by the difficulty of finding a means of tracing Miss Jethro, she reached the shady limit of the trees, and turned to walk back again. Approaching the place at which she and Francine had met, an idea occurred to her. It was just possible that Miss Jethro might not be unknown to her aunt.

Still meditating on the cold reception that she had encountered, and still feeling the influence which mastered her in spite of herself, Francine interpreted Emily's return as an implied expression of regret. She advanced with a constrained smile, and spoke first.

"How are the young ladies getting on in the schoolroom?" she asked, by way of renewing the conversation.

Emily's face assumed a look of surprise

which said plainly, Can't you take a hint and leave me to myself?

Francine was constitutionally impenetrable to reproof of this sort: her thick skin was not even tickled. "Why are you not helping them," she went on; "you, who have the clearest head among us, and take the lead in everything?"

It may be a humiliating confession to make, yet it is surely true that we are all accessible to flattery. Different tastes appreciate different methods of burning incense—but the perfume is more or less agreeable to all varieties of noses. Francine's method had its tranquilising effect on Emily. She answered, indulgently, "Miss de Sor, I have nothing to do with it."

"Nothing to do with it? No prizes to win before you leave school?"

"I won all the prizes years ago."

"But there are recitations. Surely you recite?"

Harmless words in themselves, pursuing the same smooth course of flattery as before —but with what a different result! Emily's face reddened with anger the moment they were spoken. Having already irritated Alban Morris, unlucky Francine, by a second mischievous interposition of accident, had succeeded in making Emily smart next. "Who has told you," she burst out; "I insist on knowing!"

"Nobody has told me anything!" Francine declared piteously.

"Nobody has told you how I have been insulted?"

"No, indeed! Oh, Miss Brown, who could insult *you?*"

In a man, the sense of injury does sometimes submit to the discipline of silence. In a woman—never. Suddenly reminded of

her past wrongs (by the pardonable error of a polite schoolfellow), Emily committed the startling inconsistency of appealing to the sympathies of Francine!

"Would you believe it? I have been forbidden to recite—I, the head girl of the school. Oh, not to-day! It happened a month ago—when we were all in consultation, making our arrangements. Miss Ladd asked me if I had decided on a piece to recite. I said, 'I have not only decided, I have learnt the piece.' 'And what may it be?' 'The dagger-scene in Macbeth.' There was a howl—I can call it by no other name—a howl of indignation. A man's soliloquy, and, worse still, a murdering man's soliloquy, recited by one of Miss Ladd's young ladies, before an audience of parents and guardians! That was the tone they took with me. I was as firm as a rock. The dagger-scene or nothing. The

result is—nothing! An insult to Shakespeare, and an insult to Me. I felt it—I feel it still. I was prepared for any sacrifice in the cause of the drama. If Miss Ladd had met me in a proper spirit, do you know what I would have done? I would have played Macbeth in costume. Just hear me, and judge for yourself. I begin with a dreadful vacancy in my eyes, and a hollow moaning in my voice: 'Is this a dagger that I see before me——?'"

Reciting with her face towards the trees, Emily started, dropped the character of Macbeth, and instantly became herself again: herself, with a rising colour and an angry brightening of the eyes. "Excuse me; I can't trust my memory: I must get the play." With that abrupt apology, she walked away rapidly in the direction of the house.

In some surprise, Francine turned, and

looked at the trees. She discovered—in full retreat, on his side—the eccentric drawing-master, Alban Morris.

Did he, too, admire the dagger-scene? And was he modestly desirous of hearing it recited, without showing himself? In that case, why should Emily (whose besetting weakness was certainly not want of confidence in her own resources) leave the garden the moment she caught sight of him? Francine consulted her instincts. She had just arrived at a conclusion which expressed itself outwardly by a malicious smile, when gentle Cecilia appeared on the lawn—a lovable object in a broad straw hat and a white dress, with a nosegay in her bosom—smiling, and fanning herself.

"It's so hot in the schoolroom," she said, "and some of the girls, poor things, are so ill-tempered at rehearsal—I have made my escape. I hope you got your breakfast,

Miss de Sor. What have you been doing here, all by yourself?"

"I have been making an interesting discovery," Francine replied.

"An interesting discovery, in our garden? What *can* it be?"

"The drawing-master, my dear, is in love with Emily. Perhaps she doesn't care about him. Or, perhaps, I have been an innocent obstacle in the way of an appointment between them."

Cecilia had breakfasted to her heart's content, on her favourite dish—buttered eggs. She was in such good spirits that she was inclined to be coquettish, even when there was no man present to fascinate. "We are not allowed to talk about love in this school," she said—and hid her face behind her fan. "Besides, if it came to Miss Ladd's ears, poor Mr. Morris might lose his situation."

"But isn't it true?" asked Francine.

"It may be true, my dear; but nobody knows. Emily hasn't breathed a word about it to any of us. And Mr. Morris keeps his own secret. Now and then we catch him looking at her—and we draw our own conclusions."

"Did you meet Emily on your way here?"

"Yes, and she passed without speaking to me."

"Thinking, perhaps, of Mr. Morris."

Cecilia shook her head. "Thinking, Francine, of the new life before her—and regretting, I am afraid, that she ever confided her hopes and wishes to me. Did she tell you last night what her prospects are when she leaves school?"

"She told me you had been very kind in helping her. I daresay I should have heard more, if I had not fallen asleep. What is she going to do?"

"To live in a dull house, far away in the north," Cecilia answered; "with only old people in it. She will have to write and translate for a great scholar, who is studying mysterious inscriptions—hieroglyphics, I think they are called—found among the ruins of Central America. It's really no laughing matter, Francine! Emily made a joke of it, too. 'I'll take anything but a situation as governess,' she said; 'the children who have Me to teach them would be to be pitied indeed!' She begged and prayed me to help her to get an honest living. What could I do? I could only write home to papa. He is a member of Parliament: and everybody who wants a place seems to think he is bound to find it for them. As it happened, he had heard from an old friend of his (a certain Sir Jervis Redwood), who was in search of a secretary. Being in favour of letting

the women compete for employment with the men, Sir Jervis was willing to try, what he calls, 'a female.' Isn't that a horrid way of speaking of us? and Miss Ladd says it's ungrammatical, besides. Papa had written back to say he knew of no lady whom he could recommend. When he got my letter, speaking of Emily, he kindly wrote again. In the interval, Sir Jervis had received two applications for the vacant place. They were both from old ladies—and he declined to employ them."

"Because they were old," Francine suggested, maliciously.

"You shall hear him give his own reasons, my dear. Papa sent me an extract from his letter. It made me rather angry; and (perhaps for that reason) I think I can repeat it word for word:—'We are four old people in this house, and we don't want a fifth. Let us have a young one

to cheer us. If your daughter's friend likes the terms, and is not encumbered with a sweetheart, I will send for her when the school breaks up at midsummer.' Coarse and selfish—isn't it? However, Emily didn't agree with me, when I showed her the extract. She accepted the place, very much to her aunt's surprise and regret, when that excellent person heard of it. Now that the time has come (though Emily won't acknowledge it), I believe she secretly shrinks, poor dear, from the prospect."

"Very likely," Francine agreed—without even a pretence of sympathy. "But tell me, who are the four old people?"

"First, Sir Jervis himself—seventy, last birthday. Next, his unmarried sister—nearly eighty. Next, his man servant, Mr. Rook—well past sixty. And last, his manservant's wife, who considers herself young, being only a little over forty. That is the household.

Mrs. Rook is coming to-day to attend Emily on the journey to the North; and I am not at all sure that Emily will like her."

"A disagreeable woman, I suppose?"

"No—not exactly that. Rather odd and flighty. The fact is, Mrs. Rook has had her troubles; and perhaps they have a little unsettled her. She and her husband used to keep the village inn, close to our park: we know all about them at home. I am sure I pity these poor people. What are you looking at, Francine?"

Feeling no sort of interest in Mr. and Mrs. Rook, Francine was studying her schoolfellow's lovely face in search of defects. She had already discovered that Cecilia's eyes were placed too widely apart, and that her chin wanted size and character.

"I was admiring your complexion, dear," she answered, coolly. "Well, and why do you pity the Rooks?"

Simple Cecilia smiled, and went on with her story.

"They are obliged to go out to service in their old age, through a misfortune for which they are in no way to blame. Their customers deserted the inn, and Mr. Rook became bankrupt. The inn got what they call a bad name—in a very dreadful way. There was a murder committed in the house."

"A murder?" cried Francine. "Oh, this is exciting! You provoking girl, why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"I didn't think of it," said Cecilia, placidly.

"Do go on! Were you at home when it happened?"

"I was here, at school."

"You saw the newspapers, I suppose?"

"Miss Ladd doesn't allow us to read newspapers. I did hear of it, however, in

letters from home. Not that there was much in the letters. They said it was too horrible to be described. The poor murdered gentleman——"

Francine was unaffectedly shocked. "A gentleman!" she exclaimed. "How dreadful!"

"The poor man was a stranger in our part of the country," Cecilia resumed; "and the police were puzzled about the motive for a murder. His pocket-book was missing; but his watch and his rings were found on the body. I remember the initials on his linen because they were the same as my mother's initials before she was married—'J. B.' Really, Francine, that's all I know about it."

"Surely you know whether the murderer was discovered?"

"Oh, yes—of course I know that! The government offered a reward; and clever

people were sent from London to help the county police. Nothing came of it. The murderer has never been discovered, from that time to this."

"When did it happen?"

"It happened in the autumn."

"The autumn of last year?"

"No! no! Nearly four years since."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WAY TO THE VILLAGE.

ALBAN MORRIS—discovered by Emily in concealment among the trees—was not content with retiring to another part of the grounds. He pursued his retreat, careless in what direction it might take him, to a footpath across the fields, which led to the high road and the railway station.

Miss Ladd's drawing-master was in that state of nervous irritability which seeks relief in rapidity of motion. Public opinion in the neighbourhood (especially public opinion among the women) had long since decided that his manners were offensive, and his temper incurably bad. The men

who happened to pass him on the footpath said "Good morning" grudgingly. The women took no notice of him—with one exception. She was young and saucy, and seeing him walking at the top of his speed on the way to the railway station, she called after him, "Don't be in a hurry, sir! You're in plenty of time for the London train."

To her astonishment he suddenly stopped. His reputation for rudeness was so well established that she moved away to a safe distance, before she ventured to look at him again. He took no notice of her—he seemed to be considering with himself. The frolicsome young woman had done him a service: she had suggested an idea.

"Suppose I go to London?" he thought. "Why not?—the school is breaking up for the holidays—and *she* is going away like the rest of them." He looked round in the direction of the school-house. "If

I go back to wish her good-bye, she will keep out of my way, and part with me at the last moment like a stranger. After my experience of women, to be in love again—in love with a girl who is young enough to be my daughter—what a fool, what a drivelling degraded fool I must be!"

Hot tears rose in his eyes. He dashed them away savagely, and went on again faster than ever—resolved to pack up at once at his lodgings in the village, and to take his departure by the next train.

At the point where the footpath led into the road, he came to a standstill for the second time.

The cause was once more a person of the sex associated in his mind with a bitter sense of injury. On this occasion the person was only a miserable little child, crying over the fragments of a broken jug.

Alban Morris looked at her with his grimly humorous smile. "So you've broken the jug?" he remarked.

"And spilt father's beer," the child answered. Her frail little body shook with terror. "Mother'll beat me when I go home," she said.

"What does mother do when you bring the jug back safe and sound?" Alban asked.

"Gives me bren-butter."

"Very well. Now listen to me. Mother shall give you bread-and-butter again this time."

The child stared at him with the tears suspended in her eyes. He went on talking to her as seriously as ever.

"You understand what I have just said to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you got a pocket-handkerchief?"

"No, sir."

"Then dry your eyes with mine."

He tossed his handkerchief to her with one hand, and picked up a fragment of the broken jug with the other. "This will do for a pattern," he said to himself. The child stared at the handkerchief—stared at Alban—took courage—and rubbed vigorously at her eyes. The instinct, which is worth all the reason that ever pretended to enlighten mankind—the instinct that never deceives—told this little ignorant creature that she had found a friend. She returned the handkerchief in grave silence. Alban took her up in his arms.

"Your eyes are dry, and your face is fit to be seen," he said. "Will you give me a kiss?" The child gave him a resolute kiss, with a smack in it. "Now come and get another jug," he said, as he put her down. Her red round eyes opened wide

in alarm. "Have you got money enough?" she asked. Alban slapped his pocket. "Yes, I have," he answered. "That's a good thing," said the child; "come along."

They went together hand in hand to the village, and bought the new jug, and had it filled at the beer-shop. The thirsty father was at the upper end of the fields, where they were making a drain. Alban carried the jug until they were within sight of the labourer. "You haven't far to go," he said. "Mind you don't drop it again —What's the matter now?"

"I'm frightened."

"Why?"

"Oh, give me the jug."

She almost snatched it out of his hand. If she let the precious minutes slip away, there might be another beating in store for her at the drain: her father was not of an indulgent disposition when his children

were late in bringing his beer. On the point of hurrying away, without a word of farewell, she remembered the laws of politeness as taught at the infant school —and dropped her little curtsey—and said, "Thank you, sir." That bitter sense of injury was still in Alban's mind as he looked after her. "What a pity she should grow up to be a woman!" he said to himself.

The adventure of the broken jug had delayed his return to his lodgings by more than half an hour. When he reached the road once more, the cheap up-train from the North had stopped at the station. He heard the ringing of the bell as it resumed the journey to London.

One of the passengers (judging by the hand-bag that she carried) had not stopped at the village.

As she advanced towards him along the

road, he remarked that she was a small wiry active woman — dressed in bright colours, combined with a deplorable want of taste. Her aquiline nose seemed to be her most striking feature as she came nearer. It might have been fairly proportioned to the rest of her face, in her younger days, before her cheeks had lost flesh and roundness. Being probably near-sighted, she kept her eyes half-closed ; there were cunning little wrinkles at the corners of them. In spite of appearances, she was unwilling to present any outward acknowledgment of the march of time. Her hair was palpably dyed —her hat was jauntily set on her head, and ornamented with a gay feather. She walked with a light tripping step, swinging her bag, and holding her head up smartly. Her manner, like her dress, said as plainly as words could speak, "No matter how long I may have lived, I mean to be young and

charming to the end of my days." To Alban's surprise, she stopped and addressed him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Could you tell me if I am in the right road to Miss Ladd's school?"

She spoke with nervous rapidity of articulation, and with a singularly unpleasant smile. It parted her thin lips, just widely enough to show her suspiciously beautiful teeth; and it opened her keen grey eyes in the strangest manner. The higher lid rose so as to disclose, for a moment, the upper part of the eyeball, and to give her the appearance—not of a woman bent on making herself agreeable, but of a woman staring in a panic of terror. Careless to conceal the unfavourable impression that she had produced on him, Alban answered roughly, "Straight on," and tried to pass her.

She stopped him with a peremptory gesture.

"I have treated you politely," she said, "and how do you treat me in return? Well! I am not surprised. Men are all brutes by nature—and you are a man. 'Straight on?'" she repeated, contemptuously; "I should like to know how far that helps a person in a strange place. Perhaps, you know no more where Miss Ladd's school is than I do? or, perhaps, you don't care to take the trouble of directing me? Just what I should have expected from a person of your sex! Good morning."

Alban felt the reproof; she had appealed to his most readily-impressible sense—his sense of humour. He rather enjoyed seeing his own prejudice against women grotesquely reflected in this flighty stranger's prejudice against men. As the best excuse for himself that he could make, he gave her all the information that she could possibly want—then tried again to pass on—and again

in vain. He had recovered his place in her estimation: she had not done with him yet.

"You know all about the way there," she said. "I wonder whether you know anything about the school?"

No change in her voice, no change in her manner, betrayed any special motive for putting this question. Alban was on the point of suggesting that she should go on to the school, and make her enquiries there—when he happened to notice her eyes. She had hitherto looked him straight in the face. She now looked down on the road. It was a trifling change; in all probability it meant nothing—and yet, merely because it was a change, it roused his curiosity.

"I ought to know something about the school," he answered. "I am one of the masters."

"Then you're just the man I want. May I ask your name?"

"Alban Morris."

"Thank you. I am Mrs. Rook. I presume you have heard of Sir Jervis Redwood?"

"No."

"Bless my soul! You are a scholar, of course—and you have never heard of one of your own trade. Very extraordinary. You see, I am Sir Jervis's housekeeper; and I am sent here to take one of your young ladies back with me to our place. Don't interrupt me! Don't be a brute again! Sir Jervis is not of a communicative disposition. At least, not to me. A man—that explains it—a man! He is always poring over his books and writings; and Miss Redwood, at her great age, is in bed half the day. Not a thing do I know about this new inmate of ours, except that I am to take her back with me. You would feel some curiosity yourself in my place, wouldn't you? Now do

tell me. What sort of girl is Miss Emily Brown?"

The name that he was perpetually thinking of—on this woman's lips! Alban looked at her.

"Well," said Mrs. Rook, "am I to have no answer? Ah, you want leading. So like a man again! Is she pretty?"

Still examining the housekeeper with mingled feelings of interest and distrust, Alban answered ungraciously:

"Yes."

"Good tempered?"

Alban again said, "Yes."

"So much about herself," Mrs. Rook remarked. "About her family now?" She shifted her bag restlessly from one hand to the other. "Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father—" she suddenly corrected herself—"if Miss Emily's parents are living?"

"I don't know."

"You mean you won't tell me."

"I mean exactly what I have said."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Rook rejoined; "I shall find out at the school. The first turning to the left, I think you said—across the fields?"

He was too deeply interested in Emily to let the housekeeper go without putting a question on his side:

"Is Sir Jervis Redwood one of Miss Emily's old friends?" he asked.

"He? What put that into your head? He has never even seen Miss Emily. She's going to our house—ah, the women are getting the upperhand now, and serve the men right, I say!—she's going to our house to be Sir Jervis's secretary. You would like to have the place yourself, wouldn't you? You would like to keep a poor girl from getting her own living? Oh, you

may look as fierce as you please—the time's gone by when a man could frighten *me*. I like her Christian name. I call Emily a nice name enough. But 'Brown'! Good morning, Mr. Morris; you and I are not cursed with such a contemptibly common name as that! 'Brown'? Oh, Lord!"

She tossed her head scornfully, and walked away, humming a tune.

Alban stood rooted to the spot. The effort of his later life had been to conceal the hopeless passion which had mastered him in spite of himself. Knowing nothing from Emily—who at once pitied and avoided him—of her family circumstances or of her future plans, he had shrunk from making enquiries of others, in the fear that they, too, might find out his secret, and that their contempt might be added to the contempt which he felt for himself. In this position, and with these obstacles in his way, the

announcement of Emily's proposed journey—under the care of a stranger, to fill an employment in the house of a stranger—not only took him by surprise, but inspired him with a strong feeling of distrust. He looked after Sir Jervis Redwood's flighty housekeeper, completely forgetting the purpose which had brought him thus far on the way to his lodgings. Before Mrs. Rook was out of sight, Alban Morris was following her back to the school.

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CHAPTER VII.

"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE."

Miss de Sor and Miss Wyvil were still sitting together under the trees, talking of the murder at the inn.

"And is that really all you can tell me?" said Francine.

"That is all," Cecilia answered.

"Is there no love in it?"

"None that I know of."

"It's the most uninteresting murder that ever was committed. What shall we do with ourselves? I'm tired of being here in the garden. When do the performances in the schoolroom begin?"

"Not for two hours yet."

Francine yawned. "And what part do you take in it?" she asked.

"No part, my dear. I tried once—only to sing a simple little song. When I found myself standing before all the company, and saw rows of ladies and gentlemen waiting for me to begin, I was so frightened that Miss Ladd had to make an apology for me. I didn't get over it for the rest of the day. For the first time in my life, I had no appetite for my dinner. Horrible!" said Cecilia, shuddering over the remembrance of it. "I do assure you I thought I was going to die."

Perfectly unimpressed by this harrowing narrative, Francine turned her head lazily towards the house. The door was thrown open at the same moment. A lithe little person rapidly descended the steps that led to the lawn.

"It's Emily come back again," said Francine.

"And she seems to be rather in a hurry," Cecilia remarked.

Francine's satirical smile showed itself for a moment. Did this appearance of hurry in Emily's movements denote impatience to resume the recital of "the dagger scene?" She had no book in her hand; she never even looked towards Francine. Sorrow became plainly visible in her face as she approached the two girls.

Cecilia rose in alarm. She had been the first person to whom Emily had confided her domestic anxieties. "Bad news from your aunt?" she asked.

"No, my dear; no news at all." Emily put her arms tenderly round her friend's neck. "The time has come, Cecilia," she said. "We must wish each other good-bye."

"Is Mrs. Rook here already?"

"It's *you*, dear, who are going," Emily answered, sadly. "They have sent the governess to fetch you. Miss Ladd is too busy in the schoolroom to see her—and she has told me all about it. Don't be alarmed. There is no bad news from home. Your plans are altered; that's all."

"Altered?" Cecilia repeated, "In what way?"

"In a very agreeable way—you are going to travel. Your father wishes you to be in London, in time for the evening mail to France."

Cecilia guessed what had happened. "My sister is not getting well," she said. "and the doctors are sending her to the Continent."

"To the baths at St. Moritz," Emily added. "There is only one difficulty in

the way; and you can remove it. Your sister has the good old governess to take care of her, and the courier to relieve her of all trouble on the journey. They were to have started yesterday. You know how fond Julia is of you. At the last moment, she won't hear of going away, unless you go too. The rooms are waiting at St. Moritz; and your father is annoyed (the governess says) by the delay that has taken place already."

She paused. Cecilia was silent. "Surely you don't hesitate?" Emily said.

"I am too happy to go wherever Julia goes," Cecilia answered, warmly; "I was thinking of you, dear." Her tender nature, shrinking from the hard necessities of life, shrank from the cruelly-close prospect of parting. "I thought we were to have had some hours together yet," she said. "Why are we hurried in this way?

There is no second train to London, from our station, till late in the afternoon."

"There is the express," Emily reminded her; "and there is time to catch it, if you drive at once to the town." She took Cecilia's hand, and pressed it to her bosom. "Thank you again and again, dear, for all you have done for me. Whether we meet again or not, as long as I live I shall love you. Don't cry!" She made a faint attempt to resume her customary gaiety, for Cecilia's sake. "Try to be as hard-hearted as I am. Think of your sister—don't think of me. Only kiss me!"

Cecilia's tears fell fast. "Oh, my love, I am so anxious about you! I am so afraid that you will not be happy with that selfish old man—in that dreary house. Give it up, Emily! I have got plenty of money for both of us; come abroad

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with me. Why not? You always got on well with Julia, when you came to see us in the holidays. Oh, my darling! my darling! What shall I do without you?"

All that longed for love in Emily's nature had clung round her school-friend since her father's death. Turning deadly pale under the struggle to control herself, she made the effort—and bore the pain of it without letting a cry or a tear escape her. "Our ways in life lie far apart," she said, gently. "There is the hope of meeting again, dear—if there is nothing more."

The clasp of Cecilia's arms tightened round her. She tried to release herself; but her resolution had reached its limits. Her hands dropped, trembling. She could still try to speak cheerfully, and that was all.

"There is not the least reason, Cecilia,

to be anxious about my prospects. I mean to be Sir Jervis Redwood's favourite before I have been a week in his service." She stopped, and pointed to the house. The governess was approaching them. "One more kiss, darling. We shall not forget the happy hours we have spent together; we shall constantly write to each other." She broke down at last. "Oh, Cecilia! Cecilia! leave me for God's sake—I can't bear it any longer!"

The governess parted them. Emily dropped into the chair that her friend had left. Even her hopeful nature sank under the burden of life at that moment.

A hard voice, speaking close at her side, startled her.

"Would you rather be Me," the voice asked, "without a creature to care for you?"

Emily raised her head. Francine, the

unnoticed witness of the parting interview, was standing by her, idly picking the leaves from a rose which had dropped out of Cecilia's nosegay.

Had she felt her own isolated position? She had felt it resentfully.

Emily looked at her, with a heart softened by sorrow. There was no answering kindness in the eyes of Miss de Sor—there was only a dogged endurance, sad to see in a creature so young.

"You and Cecilia are going to write to each other," she said. "I suppose there is some comfort in that. When I left the island they were glad to get rid of me. They said, 'Telegraph when you are safe at Miss Ladd's school.' You see, we are so rich, the expense of telegraphing to the West Indies is nothing to us. Besides, a telegram has an advantage over a letter—it doesn't take long to read. I daresay I

shall write home. But they are in no hurry; and I am in no hurry. The school's breaking up; you are going your way, and I am going mine—and who cares what becomes of me? Only an ugly old schoolmistress, who is paid for caring. I wonder why I am saying all this? Because I like you? I don't know that I like you any better than you like me. When I wanted to be friends with you, you treated me coolly; I don't want to force myself on you. I don't particularly care about you. May I write to you from Brighton?"

Under all this bitterness—the first exhibition of Francine's temper, at its worst, which had taken place since she joined the school—Emily saw, or thought she saw, distress that was too proud, or too shy, to show itself. "How can you ask the question?" she answered, cordially.

Francine was incapable of meeting the

sympathy offered to her, even half way. "Never mind 'how,'" she said. "Yes, or no is all I want from you."

"Oh, Francine! Francine! what are you made of! Flesh and blood? or stone and iron? Write to me, of course—and I will write back again."

"Thank you. Are you going to stay here under the trees?"

"Yes."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

"With nothing to do?"

"I can think of Cecilia."

Francine eyed her with steady attention for a moment.

"Didn't you tell me last night that you were very poor?" she asked.

"I did."

"So poor that you are obliged to earn your own living?"

"Yes."

Francine looked at her again.

"I daresay you won't believe me," she said. "I wish I was you."

She turned away irritably, and walked back to the house.

Were there really longings for kindness and love under the surface of this girl's perverse nature? Or was there nothing to be hoped from a better knowledge of her? —In place of tender remembrances of Cecilia, these were the perplexing and unwelcome thoughts which the more potent personality of Francine forced upon Emily's mind.

She rose impatiently, and looked at her watch. When would it be her turn to leave the school, and begin the new life?

Still undecided what to do next, her interest was excited by the appearance of one of the servants on the lawn. The woman

approached her, and presented a visiting-card; bearing on it the name of *Sir Jervis Redwood*. Beneath the name, there was a line written in pencil: "Mrs. Rook, to wait on Miss Emily Brown." The way to the new life was open before her at last!

Looking again at the commonplace announcement contained in the line of writing, she was not quite satisfied. Was it claiming a deference towards herself, to which she was not entitled, to expect a letter either from Sir Jervis or from Miss Redwood; giving her some information as to the journey which she was about to undertake, and expressing with some little politeness the wish to make her comfortable in her future home? At any rate, her employer had done her one service: he had reminded her that her station in life was not what it had been in the days when her father was living, and when her aunt was in affluent circumstances.

She looked up from the card. The servant had gone. Alban Morris was waiting at a little distance—waiting silently until she noticed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

EMILY'S impulse was to avoid the drawing-master for the second time. The moment afterwards, a kinder feeling prevailed. The farewell interview with Cecilia had left influences which pleaded for Alban Morris. It was the day of parting good wishes and general separations: he had only perhaps come to say good-bye. She advanced to offer her hand, when he stopped her by pointing to Sir Jervis Redwood's card.

"May I say a word, Miss Emily, about that woman?" he asked.

"Do you mean Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes. You know, of course, why she comes here?"

"She comes here, by appointment, to take me to Sir Jervis Redwood's house. Are you acquainted with her?"

She is a perfect stranger to me. I met her by accident on her way here. If Mrs. Rook had been content with asking me to direct her to the school, I should not be troubling you at this moment. But she forced her conversation on me. And she said something which I think you ought to know. Have you heard of Sir Jervis Redwood's housekeeper before to-day?"

"I have only heard what my friend—Miss Cecilia Wyvil—has told me."

"Did Miss Cecilia tell you that Mrs. Rook was acquainted with your father or with any members of your family?"

"Certainly not!"

Alban reflected. "It was natural enough,"

he resumed, "that Mrs. Rook should feel some curiosity about You. What reason had she for putting a question to me about your father—and putting it in a very strange manner?"

Emily's interest was instantly excited. She led the way back to the seats in the shade. "Tell me, Mr. Morris, exactly what the woman said." As she spoke, she signed to him to be seated.

Alban observed the natural grace of her action when she set him the example of taking a chair, and the little heightening of her colour caused by anxiety to hear what he had still to tell her. Forgetting the restraint that he had hitherto imposed on himself, he enjoyed the luxury of silently admiring her. Her manner betrayed none of the conscious confusion which would have shown itself, if her heart had been secretly inclined towards him. She saw the man looking at her. In simple perplexity she looked at the man.

"Are you hesitating on my account?" she asked. "Did Mrs. Rook say something of my father which I mustn't hear?"

"No, no! nothing of the sort!"

"You seem to be confused."

Her innocent indifference tried his patience sorely. His memory went back to the past time—recalled the ill-placed passion of his youth, and the cruel injury inflicted on him—his pride was roused. Was he making himself ridiculous? The vehement throbbing of his heart almost suffocated him. And there she sat, wondering at his odd behaviour. "Even this girl is as cold-blooded as the rest of her sex!" That angry thought gave him back his self-control. He made his excuses with the easy politeness of a man of the world.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Emily; I was considering how to put what I have to say in the fewest and plainest words. Let me

try if I can do it. If Mrs. Rook had merely asked me whether your father and mother were living, I should have attributed the question to the commonplace curiosity of a gossiping woman, and have thought no more of it. What she actually did say was this: 'Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father ——' There she checked herself, and suddenly altered the question in this way:— 'if Miss Emily's *parents* are living?' I may be making mountains out of molehills; but I thought at the time (and think still) that she had some special interest in inquiring after your father, and, not wishing me to notice it for reasons of her own, changed the form of the question so as to include your mother. Does this strike you as a far-fetched conclusion?"

"Whatever it may be," Emily said, "it is my conclusion too. How did you answer her?"

"Quite easily. I could give her no information—and I said so."

"Let me offer you the information, Mr. Morris, before we say anything more. I have lost both my parents."

Alban's momentary outbreak of irritability was at an end. He was earnest and yet gentle, again; he forgave her for not understanding how dear and how delightful to him she was. "Will it distress you," he said, "if I ask how long it is since your father died?"

"Nearly four years," she replied. "He was the most generous of men; Mrs. Rook's interest in him may surely have been a grateful interest. He may have been kind to her in past years—and she may remember him thankfully. Don't you think so?"

Alban was unable to agree with her. "If Mrs. Rook's interest in your father was the harmless interest that you have sug-

gested," he said, "why should she have checked herself in that unaccountable manner, when she first asked me if he was living? The more I think of it now, the less sure I feel that she knows anything at all of your family history. It may help me to decide, if you will tell me at what time the death of your mother took place."

"So long ago," Emily replied, "that I can't even remember her death. I was an infant at the time."

"And yet Mrs. Rook asked me if your 'parents' were living! One of two things," Alban concluded. "Either there is some mystery in this matter, which we cannot hope to penetrate at present—or Mrs. Rook may have been speaking at random; on the chance of discovering whether you are related to some 'Mr. Brown' whom she once knew."

"Besides," Emily added, "it's only fair

to remember what a common family name mine is, and how easily people may make mistakes. I should like to know if my dear lost father was really in her mind when she spoke to you. Do you think I could find it out?"

"If Mrs. Rook has any reasons for concealment, I believe you would have no chance of finding it out—unless, indeed, you could take her by surprise."

"In what way, Mr. Morris?"

"Only one way occurs to me just now," he said. "Do you happen to have a miniature or a photograph of your father?"

Emily held out a handsome locket, with a monogram in diamonds, attached to her watch chain. "I have his photograph here," she rejoined; "given to me by my dear old aunt, in the days of her prosperity. Shall I show it to Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes—if she happens, by good luck, to offer you an opportunity."

Impatient to try the experiment, Emily rose as he spoke. "I mustn't keep Mrs. Rook waiting," she said.

Alban stopped her, on the point of leaving him. The confusion and hesitation which she had already noticed began to show themselves in his manner once more.

"Miss Emily, may I ask you a favour before you go? I am only one of the masters employed in the school; but I don't think—let me say, I hope I am not guilty of presumption—if I offer to be of some small service to one of my pupils——"

There his embarrassment mastered him. He despised himself, not only for yielding to his own weakness, but for faltering like a fool in the expression of a simple request. The next words died away on his lips.

This time, Emily understood him.

The subtle penetration which had long since led her to the discovery of his secret —overpowered, thus far, by the absorbing interest of the moment—now recovered its activity. In an instant, she remembered that Alban's motive for cautioning her, in her coming intercourse with Mrs. Rook, was not the merely friendly motive which might have actuated him, in the case of one of the other girls. At the same time, her quickness of apprehension warned her not to risk encouraging this persistent lover, by betraying any embarrassment on her side. He was evidently anxious to be present (in her interests) at the interview with Mrs. Rook. Why not? Could he reproach her with raising false hopes, if she accepted his services, under circumstances of doubt and difficulty which he had himself been the first to point out? He could do nothing of the sort. Without waiting

until he had recovered himself, she answered him (to all appearance) as composedly as if he had spoken to her in the plainest terms.

"After all that you have told me," she said, "I shall indeed feel obliged if you will be present when I see Mrs. Rook."

The eager brightening of his eyes, the flush of happiness that made him look young on a sudden, were signs not to be mistaken. The sooner they were in the presence of a third person (Emily privately concluded) the better it might be for both of them. She led the way rapidly to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. ROOK AND THE LOCKET.

As mistress of a prosperous school, bearing a widely-extended reputation, Miss Ladd prided herself on the liberality of her household arrangements. At breakfast and dinner, not only the solid comforts but the elegant luxuries of the table, were set before the young ladies. "Other schools may, and no doubt do, offer to pupils the affectionate care to which they have been accustomed under the parents' roof," Miss Ladd used to say. "At my school, that care extends to their meals, and provides them with a *cuisine* which, I flatter myself, equals the most successful efforts of the

cooks at home." Fathers, mothers, and friends, when they paid visits to this excellent lady, brought away with them the most gratifying recollections of her hospitality. The men, in particular, seldom failed to recognise in their hostess the rarest virtue that a single lady can possess —the virtue of putting wine on her table which may be gratefully remembered by her guests the next morning.

An agreeable surprise awaited Mrs. Rook, when she entered the house of bountiful Miss Ladd.

Luncheon was ready for Sir Jervis Redwood's confidential emissary in the waiting-room. Detained at the final rehearsals of music and recitation, Miss Ladd was worthily represented by cold chicken and ham, a fruit tart, and a pint decanter of generous sherry. "Your mistress is a perfect lady!" Mrs. Rook said to the servant, with a

burst of enthusiasm. "I can carve for myself, thank you; and I don't care how long Miss Emily keeps me waiting."

As they ascended the steps leading into the house, Alban asked Emily if he might look again at her locket.

"Shall I open it for you?" she suggested.

"No: I only want to look at the outside of it."

He examined the side on which the monogram appeared, inlaid with diamonds. An inscription was engraved beneath.

"May I read it?" he said.

"Certainly!"

The inscription ran thus:—"In loving memory of my father. Died 30th September, 1877."

"Can you arrange the locket," Alban asked, "so that the side on which the diamonds appear hangs outwards?"

She understood him. The diamonds might attract Mrs. Rook's notice; and, in that case, she might ask to see the locket of her own accord. "You are beginning to be of use to me, already," Emily said, as they turned into the corridor which led to the waiting-room.

They found Sir Jervis's housekeeper luxuriously recumbent in the easiest chair in the room.

Of the eatable part of the lunch some relics were yet left. In the pint decanter of sherry, not a drop remained. The genial influence of the wine (hastened by the hot weather) was visible in Mrs. Rook's flushed face, and in a special development of her ugly smile. Her widening lips stretched to new lengths; and the white upper line of her eyeballs was more freely and horribly visible than ever.

"And this is the dear young lady?"

she said, lifting her hands in over-acted admiration. At the first greetings, Alban perceived that the impression produced was, in Emily's case as in his case, instantly unfavourable.

The servant came in to clear the table. Emily stepped aside for a minute to give some directions about her luggage. In that interval, Mrs. Rook's cunning little eyes turned on Alban with an expression of malicious scrutiny.

"You were walking the other way," she whispered, "when I met you." She stopped, and glanced over her shoulder at Emily. "I see what attraction has brought you back to the school. Steal your way into that poor little fool's heart; and then make her miserable for the rest of her life!—No need, Miss, to hurry," she said, shifting the polite side of her towards Emily, who returned at the

moment. "The visits of the trains to your station here are like the visits of the angels described by the poet, 'few and far between.' Please excuse the quotation. You wouldn't think it to look at me—I'm a great reader."

"Is it a long journey to Sir Jervis Redwood's house?" Emily asked, at a loss what else to say to a woman who was already becoming unendurable to her.

Mrs. Rook looked at the journey from an oppressively cheerful point of view.

"Oh, Miss Emily, you sha'n't feel the time hang heavy in my company. I can converse on a variety of topics, and if there is one thing more than another that I like, it's amusing a pretty young lady. You think me a strange creature, don't you? It's only my high spirits. Nothing strange about me—unless it's my queer Christian name. You look a little dull, my dear.

Shall I begin amusing you before we are on the railway? Shall I tell you how I came by my queer name?"

Thus far, Alban had controlled himself. This last specimen of the housekeeper's audacious familiarity reached the limits of his endurance.

"We don't care to know how you came by your name," he said.

"Rude," Mrs. Rook remarked, composedly. "But nothing surprises me, coming from a man."

She turned to Emily. "My father and mother were a wicked married couple," she continued, "before I was born. They 'got religion,' as the saying is, at a Methodist meeting in a field. When I came into the world—I don't know how you feel, Miss; I protest against being brought into the world without asking my leave first—my mother was determined to dedicate me to

piety, before I was out of my long clothes. What name do you suppose she had me christened by? She chose it, or made it, herself—the name of 'Righteous!' Righteous Rook! Was there ever a poor baby degraded by such a ridiculous name before? It's needless to say, when I write letters, I sign R. Rook—and leave people to think it's Rosamond, or Rosabelle, or something sweetly pretty of that kind. You should have seen my husband's face when he first heard that his sweetheart's name was 'Righteous!' He was on the point of kissing me, and he stopped. I daresay he felt sick. Perfectly natural under the circumstances."

Alban tried to stop her again. "What time does the train go?" he asked.

Emily entreated him to restrain himself, by a look. Mrs. Rook was still too inveterately amiable to take offence. She opened

her travelling bag briskly, and placed a railway guide in Alban's hands.

"I've heard that the women do the men's work in foreign parts," she said. "But this is England; and I am an Englishwoman. Find out when the train goes, my dear sir, for yourself."

Alban at once consulted the guide. If there proved to be no immediate need of starting for the station, he was determined that Emily should not be condemned to pass the interval in the housekeeper's company. In the meantime, Mrs. Rook was as eager as ever to show her dear young lady what an amusing companion she could be.

"Talking of husbands," she resumed, "don't make the mistake, my dear, that I committed. Beware of letting anybody persuade you to marry an old man. Mr. Rook is old enough to be my father. I bear with him. Of course, I bear with him. At

the same time, I have not (as the poet says) 'passed through the ordeal unscathed.' My spirit—I have long since ceased to believe in anything of the sort; I only use the word for want of a better—my spirit, I say, has become embittered. I was once a pious young woman; I do assure you I was nearly as good as my name. Don't let me shock you; I have lost faith and hope; I have become—what's the last new name for a free-thinker? Oh, I keep up with the times, thanks to old Miss Redwood! She takes in the newspapers, and makes me read them to her. What *is* the new name? Something ending in ic. Bombastic? No Agnostic?—that's it! I have become an Agnostic. The inevitable result of marrying an old man; if there's any blame it rests on my husband."

"There's more than an hour yet before the train starts," Alban interposed. "I am

sure, Miss Emily, you would find it pleasanter to wait in the garden."

"Not at all a bad notion," Mrs. Rook declared. "Here's a man who can make himself useful, for once. Let's go into the garden."

She rose, and led the way to the door. Alban seized the opportunity of whispering to Emily.

"Did you notice the empty decanter, when we first came in? That horrid woman is drunk."

Emily pointed significantly to the locket. "Don't let her go! The garden will distract her attention; keep her near me here."

Mrs. Rook gaily opened the door. "Take me to the flower-beds," she said; "I believe in nothing—but I adore flowers."

"You'll find it too hot in the garden," Alban said roughly.

Mrs. Rook waited at the door, with her eye on Emily. "What do *you* say, Miss?"

"I think we shall be more comfortable if we stay where we are."

"Whatever pleases you, my dear, pleases me." With this reply, the compliant housekeeper—as amiable as ever on the surface—returned to her chair.

Would she notice the locket as she sat down? Emily turned towards the window, so as to let the light fall on the diamonds.

No: Mrs. Rook was absorbed, at the moment, in her own reflections. Miss Emily, having prevented her from seeing the garden, she was maliciously bent on disappointing Miss Emily in return. Sir Jervis's secretary (being young) took a hopeful view no doubt of her future prospects. Mrs. Rook decided on darkening that view in a mischievously-suggestive manner, peculiar to herself.

"You will naturally feel some curiosity about your new home," she began, "and I haven't said a word about it yet. How very thoughtless of me! Inside and out, dear Miss Emily, our house is just a little dull. I say *our* house, and why not—when the management of it is all thrown on me. We are built of stone; and we are much too long, and are not half high enough. Our situation is on the coldest side of the county, away in the west. We are close to the Cheviot hills; and if you fancy there is anything to see when you look out of window, except sheep, you will find yourself wofully mistaken. As for walks, if you go out on one side of the house you may, or may not, be gored by cattle. On the other side, if the darkness overtakes you, you may, or may not, tumble down a deserted lead mine. But the company, inside the house, makes amends for it all," Mrs. Rook proceeded,

enjoying the expression of dismay which was beginning to show itself on Emily's face. "Plenty of excitement for you, my dear, in our small family. Sir Jervis will introduce you to plaster casts of hideous Indian idols; he will keep you writing for him, without mercy, from morning to night; and when he does let you go, old Miss Redwood will find she can't sleep, and will send for the pretty young lady-secretary to read to her. My husband I am sure you will like. He is a respectable man, and bears the highest character. Next to the idols, he's the most hideous object in the house. If you are good enough to encourage him, I don't say that he won't amuse you; he will tell you, for instance, he never in his life hated any human being as he hates his wife. By the way, I must not forget—in the interests of truth, you know—to mention one drawback that does exist in our domestic circle. One

of these days we shall have our brains blown out or our throats cut. Sir Jervis's mother left him ten thousand pounds worth of precious stones all contained in a little cabinet with drawers. He won't let the banker take care of his jewels; he won't sell them; he won't even wear one of the rings on his finger, or one of the pins at his breast. He keeps the cabinet on his dressing-room table; and he says, 'I like to gloat over my jewels, every night, before I go to bed.' Ten thousand pounds worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and what not—at the mercy of the first robber who happens to hear of them. Oh, my dear, he would have no choice, I do assure you, but to use his pistols. We shouldn't quietly submit to be robbed. Sir Jervis inherits the spirit of his ancestors. My husband has the temper of a game cock. I myself, in defence of the property of my employers, am capable

of becoming a perfect fiend. And we none of us understand the use of firearms!"

While she was in full enjoyment of this last aggravation of the horrors of the prospect, Emily tried another change of position —and, this time, with success. Greedy admiration suddenly opened Mrs. Rook's little eyes to their utmost width. "My heart alive, Miss, what do I see at your watch chain? How they sparkle! Might I ask for a closer view?"

Emily's fingers trembled; but she succeeded in detaching the locket from the chain. Alban handed it to Mrs. Rook.

She began by admiring the diamonds—with a certain reserve. "Nothing like so large as Sir Jervis's diamonds; but choice specimens, no doubt. Might I ask what the value——?"

She stopped. The inscription had attracted her notice: she began to read it

aloud:—"In loving memory of my father. Died——"

Her face instantly became rigid. The next words were suspended on her lips.

Alban seized the chance of making her betray herself—under pretence of helping her. "Perhaps you find the figures not easy to read," he said. "The date is 'thirtieth September, eighteen hundred and seventy-seven'—nearly four years since."

Not a word, not a movement, escaped Mrs. Rook. She held the locket before her as she had held it from the first. Alban looked at Emily. Her eyes were riveted on the housekeeper: she was barely capable of preserving the appearance of composure. Seeing the necessity of acting for her, he at once said the words which she was unable to say for herself.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Rook, you would like to look at the portrait?" he suggested. "Shall I open the locket for you?

Without speaking, without looking up, she handed the locket to Alban.

He opened it, and offered it to her. She neither accepted nor refused it: her hands remained hanging over the arms of the chair. He put the locket on her lap.

The portrait produced no marked effect on Mrs. Rook. Had the date prepared her to see it? She sat looking at it—still without moving: still without saying a word. Alban had no mercy on her. "That is the portrait of Miss Emily's father," he said. "Does it represent the same Mr. Brown, whom you had in your mind when you asked me if Miss Emily's father was still living?"

That question roused her. She looked up, on the instant; she answered loudly and insolently, "No!"

"And yet," Alban persisted, "you broke down in reading the inscription; and considering what a talkative woman you are,

the portrait has had a strange effect on you—to say the least of it."

She eyed him steadily while he was speaking—and turned to Emily when he had done. "You mentioned the heat, just now, Miss. The heat has overcome me; I shall soon get right again."

The insolent futility of that excuse irritated Emily into answering her. "You will get right again perhaps all the sooner," she said, "if we trouble you with no more questions, and leave you to recover by yourself."

The first change of expression which relaxed the iron tensity of the housekeeper's face, showed itself when she heard that reply. At last there was a feeling in Mrs. Rook which openly declared itself—a feeling of impatience to see Alban and Emily leave the room.

They left her, without a word more.

CHAPTER X.

GUESSES AT THE TRUTH.

"WHAT are we to do next? Oh, Mr. Morris, you must have seen all sorts of people in your time—you know human nature, and I don't. Help me with a word of advice!"

Emily forgot that he was in love with her—forgot everything but the effect produced by the locket on Mrs. Rook, and the vaguely alarming conclusion to which it pointed. In the fervour of her anxiety she took Alban's arm as familiarly as if he had been her brother. He was gentle, he was considerate; he tried earnestly to compose her. "We can do nothing to any good

purpose," he said, "unless we begin by thinking quietly. Pardon me for saying —you are needlessly exciting yourself."

There was a reason for her excitement, of which he was necessarily ignorant. Her memory of the night interview with Miss Jethro had inevitably intensified the suspicion inspired by the conduct of Mrs. Rook. In less than twenty-four hours, Emily had seen two women shrinking from secret remembrances of her father—which might well be guilty remembrances—innocently excited by herself! How had they injured him? Of what infamy, on their parts, did his beloved and stainless memory remind them? Who could fathom the mystery of it? "What does it mean?" she cried, looking wildly in Alban's compassionate face. "You *must* have formed some idea of your own. What does it mean?"

"Come, and sit down, Miss Emily. We

will try if we can find out what it means, together."

They returned to the shady solitude under the trees. Away, in front of the house, the distant grating of carriage wheels told of the arrival of Miss Ladd's guests, and of the speedy beginning of the ceremonies of the day.

"We must help each other," Alban resumed. "When we first spoke of Mrs. Rook, you mentioned Miss Cecilia Wyvil as a person who knew something about her. Have you any objection to tell me what you may have heard in that way?"

In complying with his request, Emily necessarily repeated what Cecilia had told Francine, when the two girls had met that morning in the garden.

Alban now knew how Emily had obtained employment as Sir Jervis's secretary; how Mr. and Mrs. Rook had been previously

known to Cecilia's father as respectable people keeping an inn in his own neighbourhood; and, finally, how they had been obliged to begin life again in domestic service, because the terrible event of a murder had given the inn a bad name, and had driven away the customers on whose encouragement their business depended.

Listening in silence, Alban remained silent when Emily's narrative had come to an end.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked.

"I am thinking over what I have just heard," he answered.

Emily noticed a certain formality in his tone and manner, which disagreeably surprised her. He seemed to have made his reply as a mere concession to politeness, while he was thinking of something else which really interested him.

"Have I disappointed you in any way?" she asked.

"On the contrary, you have interested me. I want to be quite sure that I remember exactly what you have said. You mentioned, I think, that your friendship with Miss Cecilia Wyvil began here, at the school?"

"Yes."

"And in speaking of the murder at the village inn, you told me that the crime was committed—I have forgotten how long ago?"

His manner still suggested that he was idly talking about what she had told him, while some more important subject for reflection was in possession of his mind.

"I don't know that I said anything about the time that had passed since the crime was committed," she answered sharply. "What does the murder matter to *us?* I

think Cecilia told me it happened about four years since. Excuse me for noticing it, Mr. Morris—you seem to have some interests of your own to occupy your attention. Why couldn't you say so plainly when we came out here? I should not have asked you to help me, in that case. Since my poor father's death, I have been used to fight through my troubles by myself."

She rose, and looked at him proudly. The next moment her eyes filled with tears.

In spite of her resistance, Alban took her hand. "Dear Miss Emily," he said, "you distress me; you have not done me justice. Your interests only are in my mind."

Answering her in those terms, he had not spoken as frankly as usual. He had only told her a part of the truth.

Hearing that the woman whom they had just left had been landlady of an inn, and

that a murder had been committed under her roof, he was led to ask himself if any explanation might be found, in these circumstances, of the otherwise incomprehensible effect produced on Mrs. Rook by the inscription on the locket.

In the pursuit of this inquiry, there had arisen in his mind a monstrous suspicion, which pointed to Mrs. Rook. It impelled him to ascertain the date at which the murder had been committed, and (if the discovery encouraged further investigation) to find out next the manner in which Mr. Brown had died.

Thus far, what progress had he made? He had discovered that the date of Mr. Brown's death, inscribed on the locket, and the date of the crime committed at the inn, approached each other nearly enough to justify further investigation.

In the meantime, had he succeeded in

keeping his object concealed from Emily? He had perfectly succeeded. Hearing him declare that her interests only had occupied his mind, the poor girl innocently entreated him to forgive her little outbreak of temper. "If you have any more questions to ask me, Mr. Morris, pray go on. I promise never to think unjustly of you again."

He went on, with an uneasy conscience—for it seemed cruel to deceive her, even in the interests of truth—but still he went on.

"Suppose we assume that this woman has injured your father in some way," he said." Am I right in believing that it was in his character to forgive injuries?"

"Entirely right."

"In that case, his death may have left Mrs. Rook in a position to be called to account, by those who owe a duty to his memory—I mean the surviving members of his family."

"There are but two of us, Mr. Morris. My aunt and myself."

"There are his executors."

"My aunt is his only executor."

"Your father's sister—I presume?"

"Yes."

"He may have left instructions with her, which might be of the greatest use to us."

"I will write to-day, and find out," Emily replied. "I had already planned to consult my aunt," she added, thinking again of Miss Jethro.

"If your aunt has not received any positive instructions," Alban continued, "she may remember some allusion to Mrs. Rook, on your father's part, at the time of his last illness——"

Emily stopped him. "You don't know how my dear father died" she said. "He was struck down—apparently in perfect health—by disease of the heart."

"Struck down in his own house?"

"Yes—in his own house."

Those words closed Alban's lips. The investigation so carefully and so delicately conducted, had failed to serve any useful purpose. He had now ascertained the manner of Mr. Brown's death, and the place of Mr. Brown's death—and he was as far from confirming his suspicions of Mrs. Rook as ever.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DRAWING-MASTER'S CONFESSION.

"Is there nothing else you can suggest?" Emily asked.

"Nothing—at present."

"If my aunt fails us, have we no other hope?"

"I have hope in Mrs. Rook," Alban answered. "I see I surprise you; but I really mean what I say. Sir Jervis's housekeeper is an excitable woman, and she is fond of wine. There is always a weak side in the character of such a person as that. If we wait for our chance, and turn it to the right use when it comes, we may yet succeed in making her betray herself."

Emily listened to him in bewilderment.

"You talk as if I was sure of your help in the future," she said. "Have you forgotten that I leave school to-day, never to return? In half an hour more, I shall be condemned to a long journey in the company of that horrible creature—with a life to look forward to, in the same house with her, among strangers! A miserable prospect, and a hard trial of a girl's courage—is it not, Mr. Morris?"

"You will at least have one person, Miss Emily, who will try with all his heart and soul to encourage you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Alban quietly, "that the Midsummer vacation begins to-day; and that the drawing-master is going to spend his holidays in the North."

Emily jumped up from her chair. "You!" she exclaimed, "*You* are going to Northumberland? With me?"

"Why not?" Alban asked. "The railway is open to all travellers alike, if they have money enough to buy a ticket."

"Mr. Morris! what *can* you be thinking of? Indeed, indeed I am not ungrateful. I know you mean kindly—you are a good generous man. But do remember how completely a girl, in my position, is at the mercy of appearances. You, travelling in the same carriage with me! and that woman putting her own vile interpretation on it, and degrading me in Sir Jervis Redwood's estimation, on the day when I enter his house! Oh, it's worse than thoughtless—it's madness, downright madness."

"You are quite right," Alban gravely agreed, "it *is* madness. I lost whatever little reason I once possessed, Miss Emily, on the day when I first met you out walking with the young ladies of the school."

Emily turned away in significant silence. Alban followed her.

"You promised, just now," he said, "never to think unjustly of me again. I respect and admire you far too sincerely to take a base advantage of this occasion—the only occasion on which I have been permitted to speak with you alone. Wait a little before you condemn a man whom you don't understand. I will say nothing to annoy you—I only ask leave to explain myself. Will you take your chair again?"

She returned unwillingly to her seat. "It can only end," she thought sadly, "in my disappointing him!"

"I have had the worst possible opinion of women, for years past," Alban resumed; "and the only reason I can give for it condemns me out of my own mouth. I have been infamously treated by one woman; and my wounded self-esteem has meanly revenged

itself by reviling the whole sex. Wait a little, Miss Emily. My fault has received its fit punishment. I have been thoroughly humiliated—and *you* have done it."

"Mr. Morris!"

"Take no offence, pray, where no offence is meant. Some few years since, it was the great misfortune of my life to meet with a Jilt. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"She was my equal by birth (I am a younger son of a country squire), and my superior in rank. I can honestly tell you that I was fool enough to love her with all my heart and soul. She never allowed me to doubt—I may say this without conceit, remembering the miserable end of it—that my feeling for her was returned. Her father and mother (excellent people) approved of the contemplated marriage. She accepted my presents; she allowed all the

customary preparations for a wedding to proceed to completion; she had not even mercy enough, or shame enough, to prevent me from publicly degrading myself by waiting for her at the altar, in the presence of a large congregation. The minutes passed—and no bride appeared. The clergyman, waiting like me, was requested to return to the vestry. I was invited to follow him. You foresee the end of the story, of course? She had run away with another man. But can you guess who the man was? Her groom."

Emily's face reddened with indignation. "She suffered for it? Oh, Mr. Morris, surely she suffered for it!"

"Not at all. She had money enough to reward the groom for marrying her; and she let herself down easily to her husband's level. It was a suitable marriage in every respect. When I last heard

of them, they were regularly in the habit of getting drunk together. I am afraid I have disgusted you? We will drop the subject, and resume my precious autobiography at a later date. One showery day in the autumn of last year, you young ladies went out with Miss Ladd for a walk. When you were all trotting back again, under your umbrellas, did you (in particular) notice an ill-tempered fellow standing in the road, and getting a good look at you, on the high footpath above him?"

Emily smiled, in spite of herself. "I don't remember it," she said.

"You wore a brown jacket which fitted you as if you had been born in it—and you had the smartest little straw hat I ever saw on a woman's head. It was the first time I ever noticed such things. I think I could paint a portrait of the boots you wore (mud included), from memory

alone. That was the impression you produced on me. After believing, honestly believing, that love was one of the lost illusions of my life—after feeling, honestly feeling, that I would as soon look at the devil, as look at a woman—there was the state of mind to which retribution had reduced me; using for its instrument, Miss Emily Brown. Oh, don't be afraid of what I may say next! In your presence, and out of your presence, I'm man enough to be ashamed of my own folly. I am resisting your influence over me at this moment, with the strongest of all resolutions—the resolution of despair. Let's look at the humorous side of the story again. What do you think I did when the regiment of young ladies had passed by me?"

Emily declined to guess.

"I followed you back to the school; and, on pretence of having a daughter to

educate, I got one of Miss Ladd's prospectuses from the porter at the lodge gate. I was in your neighbourhood, you must know, on a sketching tour. I went back to my inn, and seriously considered what had happened to me. The result of my cogitations was that I went abroad. Only for a change—not at all because I was trying to weaken the impression you had produced on me! After awhile, I returned to England. Only because I was tired of travelling—not at all because your influence drew me back! Another interval passed; and luck turned my way, for a wonder. The drawing-master's place became vacant here. Miss Ladd advertised; I produced my testimonials; and took the situation. Only because the salary was a welcome certainty, to a poor man—not at all because the new position brought me into personal association with Miss Emily Brown! Do

you begin to see why I have troubled you with all this talk about myself? Apply the contemptible system of self-delusion which my confession has revealed, to that holiday arrangement for a tour in the north which has astonished and annoyed you. I am going to travel this afternoon by your train. Only because I feel an intelligent longing to see the northernmost county of England—not at all because I won't let you trust yourself alone with Mrs. Rook! Not at all because I won't leave you to enter Sir Jervis Redwood's service, without a friend within reach in case you want him! Mad? Oh, yes—perfectly mad. But, tell me this: What do all sensible people do when they find themselves in the company of a lunatic? They humour him. Let me take your ticket, and see your luggage labelled; I only ask leave to be your travelling

servant. If you are proud—I shall like you all the better, if you are—pay me wages, and keep me in my proper place in that way."

Some girls, addressed with this reckless intermingling of jest and earnest, would have felt confused; and some would have felt flattered. With a good-tempered resolution, which never passed the limits of modesty and refinement, Emily met Alban Morris on his own ground.

"You have said you respect me," she began; "I am going to prove that I believe you. The least I can do is not to misinterpret you, on my side. Am I to understand, Mr. Morris—you won't think the worse of me, I hope, if I speak plainly—am I to understand that you are in love with me?"

"Yes, Miss Emily—if you please."

He had answered with the quaint gravity which was peculiar to him; but he was

already conscious of a sense of discouragement. Her composure was a bad sign—from his point of view.

"My time will come, I dare say," she proceeded. "At present I know nothing of love, by experience; I only know what some of my schoolfellows talk about in secret. Judging by what they tell me, a girl blushes, when her lover pleads with her to favour his addresses. Am I blushing?"

"Must I speak plainly, too?" Alban asked.

"If you have no objection," she answered, as composedly as if she had been addressing her grandfather.

"Then, Miss Emily, I must say—you are not blushing."

She went on. "Another token of love—as I am informed—is to tremble. Am I trembling?"

"No."

"Am I too confused to look at you?"

"No."

"Do I walk away, with dignity—and then stop, and steal a timid glance at my lover, over my shoulder?"

"I wish you did!"

"A plain answer, Mr. Morris! Yes, or No."

"No—of course."

"In one last word, do I give you any sort of encouragement to try again?"

"In one last word, I have made a fool of myself—and you have taken the kindest possible way of telling me so."

This time, she made no attempt to reply in his own tone. The good-humoured gaiety of her manner disappeared. She was in earnest—truly sadly in earnest—when she said her next words.

"Is it not best, in your own interests, that we should bid each other good-bye?" she asked. "In the time to come—when you

only remember how kind you once were to me—we may look forward to meeting again. After all that you have suffered, so bitterly and so undeservedly, don't, pray don't, make me feel that another woman has behaved cruelly to you, and that I—so grieved to distress you—am that heartless creature!"

Never in her life had she been so irresistibly charming as she was at that moment. Her sweet nature showed all its innocent pity for him in her face.

He saw it—he felt it—he was not unworthy of it. In silence, he lifted her hand to his lips. He turned pale as he kissed it.

"Say that you agree with me!" she [illegible] leaded.

"I obey you."

As he answered, he pointed to the lawn at [illegible] eir feet. "Look," he said, "at that dead [illegible] af which the air is wafting over the grass [illegible] it possible that such sympathy as you feel

for Me, such love as I feel for You, can waste, wither, and fall to the ground like that leaf? I leave you, Emily—with the firm conviction that there is a time of fulfilment to come in our two lives. Happen what may in the interval—I trust the future."

The words had barely passed his lips, when the voice of one of the servants reached them from the house. "Miss Emily! are you in the garden?"

Emily stepped out into the sunshine. The servant hurried to meet her, and placed a [redacted]

"Say that you agree with [redacted]" he pleaded.

"I obey you."

As he answered, he pointed to the lawn at their feet. "Look," he said, "at that dead leaf which the air is wafting over the grass Is it possible that such sympathy as you feel

"Read it," she said faintly, as Alban picked it up.

He read these words: "Come to London directly. Miss Letitia is dangerously ill."

"Your aunt?" he asked.

"Yes—my aunt."

Book the Second.

IN LONDON.

BOOK THE SECOND.

In London.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. ELLMOTHER.

THE metropolis of Great Britain is, in certain respects, like no other metropolis on the face of the earth. In the population that throngs the streets, the extremes of Wealth and the extremes of Poverty meet, as they meet nowhere else. In the streets themselves, the glory and the shame of architecture—the mansion and the hovel—are neighbours in situation, as they are neighbours nowhere else. London, in its social aspect, is the city of contrasts.

Towards the close of evening, Emily left the railway terminus for the place of

residence in which loss of fortune had compelled her aunt to take refuge. As she approached her destination, the cab passed—by merely crossing a road—from a spacious and beautiful Park, with its surrounding houses topped by statues and cupolas, to a row of cottages, hard by a stinking ditch miscalled a canal. The city [illegible]f contrasts: north and south, east and [illegible]st, the city of social contrasts.

[illegible]Emily stopped the cab before the gar[illegible] gate of a cottage, at the further end [illegible]the row. The bell was answered by [illegible]one servant now in her aunt's employment—[illegible] maid.

Personally, this good creature was one of the ill-fated women, whose appearance suggests that Nature intended to make men of them, and altered her mind at the last moment. Miss Letitia's maid was tall and gaunt and awkward. The first

impression produced by her face was an impression of bones. They rose high on her forehead; they projected on her cheeks; and they reached their boldest development in her jaws. In the cavernous eyes of this unfortunate person rigid obstinacy and rigid goodness looked out together, with equal severity, on all her fellow-creatures alike. Her mistress (w[illegible] she had served for a quarter of a [illegible]tury and more) called her "Bony." Sh[illegible] accepted this cruelly appropriate nick-nam[illegible] as a mark of affectionate familiarity wh[illegible] looked [illegible] person

"Here's the doctor," she announced. "It seems I can't satisfy you; ask him what's the matter. Come in, doctor." She threw open the door of the parlour, and introduced Emily. "This is the mistress's niece, sir. Please try if *you* can keep her quiet. I can't." She placed

you be distressed about her. 'Don't tell Emily;' those were her orders, as long as she kept her senses."

"Kept her senses? Good heavens! what do you mean?"

"Fever—that's what I mean."

"I must see her directly; I am not afraid of infection."

"There's no infection to be afraid of. [illegible] you mustn't see her for all that."

"I insist on seeing her."

"Miss Emily, I am disappointing you [illegible] your own good. [illegible] enough [illegible] ever met with. But devoted to her mistress, and, making allowance for her awkwardness, not a bad nurse. I am afraid I can't give you an encouraging report of your aunt. The rheumatic fever (aggravated by the situation of this house —built on clay, you know, and close to

"It's not to be done, I tell you! How can you see Miss Letitia, when she can't bear the light in her room? Do you know what colour her eyes are? Red, poor soul—red as a boiled lobster."

With every word the woman uttered, Emily's perplexity and distress increased.

"You told me my aunt's illness was fever," she said—"and now you speak of some complaint in her eyes. Stand out of the way, if you please, and let me go to her."

Mrs. Ellmother, still keeping her place, [illegible] through the open door [illegible] time when the [illegible] usually sets in. I'll see if there's a interval."

He opened the door—and came again.

"By the way," he resumed, "I ought p[illegible] haps to explain how it was that I too[illegible] the liberty of sending you that telegram

chairs with the hospitable politeness of the old school—and returned to her post at Miss Letitia's bedside.

Doctor Allday was an elderly man, with a cool manner and a ruddy complexion—thoroughly acclimatised to the atmosphere of pain and grief in which it was his destiny to live. He spoke to Emily (without any undue familiarity) as if he had been accustomed to see her for the greater part of her life.

"That's a curious woman," he said, when Mrs. Ellmother closed the door·

stagnant water) has been latterly complicated by delirium."

"Is that a bad sign, sir?"

"The worst possible sign; it shews that the disease has affected the heart. Yes: she is suffering from inflammation of the eyes, but that is an unimportant symptom. We can keep the pain under by means of cooling lotions and a dark room. I've often heard her speak of you—especially since the illness assumed a serious character. What did you say? Will she know you, when you go into her room? This

Mrs. Ellmother refused to inform you of her mistress's serious illness. That circumstance, according to my view of it, laid the responsibility on the doctor's shoulders. The form taken by your aunt's delirium—I mean the apparent tendency of the words that escape her in that state—seems to excite some incomprehensible feeling in the mind of her crabbed servant. She wouldn't even let *me* go into the bedroom, if she could possibly help it. Did Mrs. Ellmother give you a warm welcome when you came here?"

"F[illegible] arrival seemed to "the mo[illegible]adstro[illegible]

century? 'For thirty years he was the best of servants; and for thirty years he has been the hardest of masters.' Quite true—I might say the same of my housekeeper. Rather a good story, isn't it?"

The story was completely thrown away on Emily; but one subject interested her now. "My poor aunt has always been fond of me," she said. "Perhaps she might know me, when she recognises nobody else."

"Not very likely," the doctor answered. "But there's no [illegible] rule, [illegible]times

me to hope'—and you will be quite right. Instead of talking of my medical experience, I shall do better to look at Miss Letitia, and let you know the result. You have got other relations, I suppose? No? Very distressing—very distressing."

Who has not suffered as Emily suffered, when she was left alone? Are there not moments—if we dare to confess the truth—when poor humanity loses its hold on the consolations of religion and the hope of immortality, and feels the cruelty of creation [illegible] condition

go to her the better perhaps—if you have anything to say which depends on her recognising your voice. I'll call to-morrow morning. Very distressing," he repeated, taking his hat and making his bow—"Very distressing."

Emily crossed the narrow little passage which separated the two rooms, and opened the bedchamber door. Mrs. Ellmother met her on the threshold. "No," said the obstinate old servant, "you can't come in."

The faint voice of Miss Letitia made itself heard, calling Mrs. Ellmother by her familiar nickname.

"Bony, who is it?"

"Never mind."

"Who is it?"

"Don't come in, Emily. It will only distress you—and it will do me no good. God bless you, my love. Don't come in."

"There!" said Mrs. Ellmother. "Do you hear that? Go back to the sitting-room."

Thus far, the hard necessity of controlling herself had kept Emily silent. She was now able to speak without tears. "Remember the old times, aunt," she pleaded gently. "Don't keep me out of your room, when I have come here to nurse you!"

"I'm her nurse. Go back to the sitting-room," Mrs. Ellmother repeated.

[redacted] lasts while life lasts. The dy-

orders," she said to her mistress. "You don't know how soon you may begin wandering in your mind again. Think, Miss Letitia—think."

This remonstrance was received in silence. Mrs. Ellmother's great gaunt figure still blocked up the doorway.

"If you force me to it," Emily said quietly, "I must go to the doctor, and ask him to interfere."

"Do you mean that?" Mrs. Ellmother said quietly, on her side.

"I do mean it," was the answer.

The old servant suddenly submitted—with a look which took Emily by surprise. She had expected to see [redacted] that now con[redacted]

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS LETITIA.

EMILY entered the room. The door was immediately closed on her from the outer side. Mrs. Ellmother's heavy steps were heard, retreating along the passage. Then, the banging of the door that led into the kitchen shook the flimsily-built cottage. Then, there was silence.

The dim light of a lamp, hidden away [redacted] and screened by a dingy green [redacted] closely-curtained

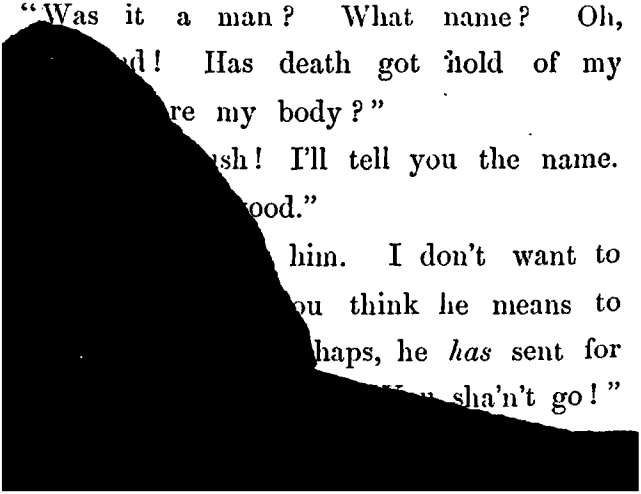
irritable nerves, and an open case containing a machine for pouring drops into the eyes. The smell of fumigating pastilles hung heavily on the air. To Emily's excited imagination, the silence was like the silence of death. She approached the bed trembling. "Won't you speak to me, aunt?"

"Is that you, Emily? Who let you come in?"

"You said I might come in, you thirsty? I see some le table. Shall I give it to

"No! If you open th let in the light. My you here, my dear? the school?"

"You were going somewhere when you left school," she said; "and Cecilia Wyvil had something to do with it. Oh, my love, how cruel of you to go away to a stranger, when you might live here with me?" She paused—her sense of what she had herself just said began to grow confused. "What stranger?" she asked abruptly. "Was it a man? What name? Oh, [illegible]d! Has death got hold of my [illegible]re my body?"



[illegible]sh! I'll tell you the name. [illegible]ood."

[illegible] him. I don't want to [illegible]ou think he means to [illegible]haps, he *has* sent for [illegible] sha'n't go!"

"*Has* he sent for you?" she said again, louder than before.

Emily replied once more, in terms carefully chosen with the one purpose of pacifying her. The attempt proved to be useless, and worse—it seemed to make her suspicious. "I won't be deceived!" she said; "I mean to know all about it. He did send for you. Whom did he send?"

"His housekeeper."

"What name?" The tone put the question told of was rising to its c know that I'm cu she burst out. " me? Who is it?"

Emily waited — hesitated — advanced, to part the curtains, and look in at her aunt. She was stopped by a dreadful sound of laughter—the cheerless laughter that is heard among the mad. It suddenly ended in a dreary sigh.

Afraid to look in, she spoke, hardly knowing what she said. "Is there anything you wish for? Shall I call— ?"

Letitia's voice interrupted her. Dull, muttering, it was unlike, e, the familiar voice of range words.

hat does Mrs. Rook band either? Bony, ened about nothing.

own district—and the jury too. A risky deception? I call it a pious fraud. And I have a tender conscience, and a cultivated mind. The newspaper? How is *our* newspaper to find its way to her, I should like to know? You poor old Bony! Upon my word, you do me good—you make me laugh."

The cheerless laughter broke out again—and died away again drearily in a sigh.

Accustomed to decide rapidly in the ordinary emergencies of her life, Emily felt herself painfully embarrassed by the position in which she was now placed.

After what she had already heard, could she reconcile it to her sense of duty to her aunt to remain

these circumstances, had Emily made any discoveries which convicted her of taking a base advantage of her position at the bedside? Most assuredly not! The nature of the act of concealment; the causes that had led to it; the person (or persons) affected by it—these were mysteries which left her entirely in the dark. She had found out that her aunt was acquainted with Mrs. Rook, and that was literally all she knew.

Blameless, so far, in the line of conduct that she had pursued, might she still remain in the bed-chamber—on this distinct understanding with herself: that she would instantly return to the sitting-room if she could suggest a

say, No — when inclination says, Yes ?" Emily's conscience sided with her reluctance to leave her aunt.

Throughout the time occupied by these reflections, the silence had remained unbroken. Emily began to feel uneasy. She timidly put her hand through the curtains, and took Miss Letitia's hand. The contact with the burning skin startled her. She turned away to the door, to call the servant —when the sound of her aunt's voice hurried her back to the bed.

"Are you there, Bony ?" the voice asked.

Was her mind getting clear again ? Emily tried the experiment of making a plain reply. "Your [illegible] she said [illegible]

the servants but you, Bony, have been sent away. London's the place for us. No gossiping servants and no curious neighbours in London. Bury the horrid truth in London. Ah, you may well say I look anxious and wretched. I hate deception—and yet, it must be done. Why do you waste time in talking? Why don't you find out where that vile woman lives? Only let me get at her—and I'll make Sara ashamed of herself."

Emily's heart beat fast when she heard the woman's name. "Sara" (as she and her schoolfellows knew) was the baptismal name of Miss Jethro. Had her aunt alluded to the disgraced teacher, or to some other

There

In the fervour of her anxiety to set her doubts at rest, Emily's faith in her own good resolutions began to waver. The temptation to say something which might set her aunt talking again was too strong to be resisted—if she remained at the bedside. Despairing of herself, she rose and turned to the door. In the moment that passed, while she crossed the room, the very words occurred to her that would suit her purpose. Her cheeks were hot with shame—she hesitated—she looked back at the bed—the words passed her lips.

"Sara is only one of the woman's names," she said. "Do you like her other name?"

The rapidly-muttering tones broke out again instantly—but not in answer to Emily. The sound of a voice had encouraged Miss Letitia to pursue her own confused train of thought, and had stimu-

lated the fast-failing capacity of speech to exert itself once more.

"No! no! He's too cunning for you, and too cunning for me. He doesn't leave letters about; he destroys them all. Did I say he was too cunning for us? It's false. We are too cunning for him. Who found the morsels of his letter in the basket? Who stuck them together? Ah, *we* know! Don't read it, Bony. 'Dear Miss Jethro'—don't read it again. 'Miss Jethro' in his letter; and 'Sara,' when he talks to himself in the garden. O, who would have believed it of him, if we hadn't seen it and heard it ourselves!"

There was no more doubt now.

But who was the man, so bitterly and so regretfully alluded to?

No: this time Emily held firmly by the resolution which bound her to

respect the helpless position of her aunt. The speediest way of summoning Mrs. Ellmother would be to ring the bell. As she touched the handle a faint cry of suffering from the bed called her back.

"Oh, so thirsty!" murmured the failing voice—"so thirsty!"

She parted the curtains. The shrouded lamplight just showed her the green shade over Miss Letitia's eyes—the hollow cheeks below it—the arms laid helplessly on the bed-clothes. "Oh, aunt, don't you know my voice? Don't you know Emily? Let me kiss you, dear!" Useless to plead with her; useless to kiss her; she only reiterated the words, "So thirsty! so thirsty!" Emily raised the poor tortured body with a patient caution which spared it pain, and put the glass to her aunt's lips. She drank the lemonade to the

last drop. Refreshed for the moment, she spoke again—spoke to the visionary servant of her delirious fancy, while she rested in Emily's arms.

"For God's sake, take care how you answer, if she questions you. If *she* knew what *we* know! Are men ever ashamed? Ha! the vile woman! the vile woman!"

Her voice, sinking gradually, dropped to a whisper. The next few words that escaped her were muttered inarticulately. Little by little, the false energy of fever was wearing itself out. She lay silent and still. To look at her now was to look at the image of death. Once more, Emily kissed her—closed the curtains—and rang the bell.

Mrs. Ellmother failed to appear. Emily left the room to call to her.

Arrived at the top of the kitchen stairs, she noticed a slight change. The

door below, which she had heard banged on first entering her aunt's room, now stood open. She called to Mrs. Ellmother.

A strange voice answered her. Its accent was soft and courteous; presenting the strongest imaginable contrast to the harsh tones of Miss Letitia's crabbed old maid.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Miss?"

The person making this polite inquiry appeared at the foot of the stairs—a plump and comely woman of middle age. She looked up at the young lady with a pleasant smile.

"I beg your pardon," Emily said; "I had no intention of disturbing you. I called to Mrs. Ellmother."

The stranger advanced a little way up the stairs, and answered, "Mrs. Ellmother is not here."

"Do you expect her back soon?"

"Excuse me, Miss—I don't expect her back at all."

"Do you mean to say that she has left the house?"

"Yes, Miss. She has left the house."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. MOSEY.

EMILY'S first act—after the discovery of Mrs. Ellmother's incomprehensible disappearance—was to invite the new servant to follow her into the sitting-room.

"Can you explain this?" she began.

"No, Miss."

"May I ask if you have come here, by Mrs. Ellmother's invitation?"

"By Mrs. Ellmother's *request*, Miss."

"Can you tell me how she came to make the request?"

"With pleasure, Miss. Perhaps—as you find me here, a stranger to yourself, in place of the customary servant—I ought to begin by giving you a reference?"

"And, perhaps (if you will be so kind), by mentioning your name," Emily added.

"Thank you for reminding me, Miss. My name is Elizabeth Mosey. I am well known to the gentleman who attends Miss Letitia. Doctor Allday will speak to my character, and also to my experience as a nurse. If it would be in any way satisfactory to give you a second reference—"

"Quite needless, Mrs. Mosey."

"Permit me to thank you again, Miss. I was at home this evening, when Mrs. Ellmother called at my lodgings. Says she, 'I have come here, Elizabeth, to ask a favour of you for 'old friendship's sake.' Says I, 'My dear, pray command me, whatever it may be.' If this seems rather a hasty answer to make, before I knew what the favour was, might I ask you to bear in mind that Mrs Ellmother put it to me "for old friendship's sake"

—alluding to my late husband, and to the business which we carried on at that time? Through no fault of ours, we got into difficulties. Persons whom we had trusted proved unworthy. Not to trouble you further, I may say at once, we should have been ruined, if our old friend Mrs. Ellmother had not come forward, and trusted us with the savings of her life-time. The money was all paid back again, before my husband's death. But I don't consider—and, I think you won't consider—that the obligation was paid back too. Prudent or not prudent, there is nothing Mrs. Ellmother can ask of me that I am not willing to do. If I have put myself in an awkward situation (and I don't deny that it looks so) this is the only excuse, Miss, that I can make for my conduct."

Mrs. Mosey was too fluent, and too

fond of hearing the sound of her own eminently persuasive voice. Making allowance for these little drawbacks, the impression that she produced was decidedly favourable; and, however rashly she might have acted, her motive was beyond reproach. Having said some kind words to this effect, Emily led her back to the main interest of her narrative.

"Did Mrs. Ellmother give no reason for leaving my aunt, at such a time as this?" she asked.

"The very words I said to her, Miss."

"And what did she say, by way of reply?"

"She burst out crying—a thing I have never known her to do before, in an experience of twenty years."

"And she really asked you to take her place here, at a moment's notice?"

"That was just what she did," Mrs.

Mosey answered. "I had no need to tell her I was astonished; my looks spoke for me, no doubt. She's a hard woman in speech and manner, I admit. But there's more feeling in her than you would suppose. 'If you are the good friend I take you for,' she says, 'don't ask me for reasons; I am doing what is forced on me, and doing it with a heavy heart.' In my place, Miss, would you have insisted on her explaining herself, after that? The one thing I naturally wanted to know was, if I could speak to some lady, in the position of mistress here, before I ventured to intrude. Mrs. Ellmother understood that it was her duty to help me in this particular. Your poor aunt being out of the question, she mentioned you."

"How did she speak of me? In an angry way?"

"No, indeed—quite the contrary. She

says, 'You will find Miss Emily at the cottage. She is Miss Letitia's niece. Everybody likes her—and everybody is right.'"

"She really said that?"

"Those were her words. And, what is more, she gave me a message for you at parting. 'If Miss Emily is surprised' (that was how she put it) 'give her my duty and good wishes; and tell her to remember what I said, when she took my place at her aunt's bedside.' I don't presume to inquire what this means," said Mrs. Mosey, respectfully ready to hear what it meant, if Emily would only be so good as to tell her. "I deliver the message, Miss, as it was delivered to me. After which, Mrs. Ellmother went her way, and I went mine."

"Do you know where she went?"

"No, Miss."

"Have you nothing more to tell me?"

"Nothing more; except that she gave me

my directions, of course, about the nursing. I took them down in writing—and you will find them in their proper place, with the prescriptions and the medicines."

Acting at once on this hint, Emily led the way to her aunt's room.

Miss Letitia was silent, when the new nurse softly parted the curtains—looked in—and drew them together again. Consulting her watch, Mrs. Mosey compared her written directions with the medicine-bottles on the table, and set one apart to be used at the appointed time. "Nothing, so far, to alarm us," she whispered. "You look sadly pale and tired, Miss. Might I advise you to rest a little?"

"If there is any change, Mrs. Mosey—either for the better or the worse—of course you will let me know?"

"Certainly, Miss!"

Emily returned to the sitting-room: not

to rest (after all that she had heard), but to. think.

Amid much that was unintelligible, certain plain conclusions presented themselves to her mind.

After what the doctor had already said to Emily, on the subject of delirium generally, Mrs. Ellmother's proceedings became intelligible: they proved that she knew by experience the perilous course taken by her mistress's wandering thoughts, when they expressed themselves in words. This explained the concealment of Miss Letitia's illness from her niece, as well as the reiterated efforts of the old servant to prevent Emily from entering the bed-room.

But the event which had just happened—that is to say, Mrs. Ellmother's sudden departure from the cottage—was not only of serious importance in itself, but pointed to a startling conclusion.

The faithful maid had left the mistress, whom she had loved and served, sinking under a fatal illness—and had put another woman in her place, careless of what that woman might discover by listening at the bedside—rather than confront Emily after she had been within hearing of her aunt, while the brain of the suffering woman was deranged by fever. There was the state of the case, in plain words.

In what frame of mind had Mrs. Ellmother adopted this desperate course of action?

To use her own expression, she had deserted Miss Letitia "with a heavy heart." To judge by her own language addressed to Mrs. Mosey, she had left Emily to the mercy of a stranger—animated, nevertheless, by sincere feelings of attachment and respect. That her fears had taken for granted suspicion which Emily had not felt, and discoveries which Emily had (as yet) not

made, in no way modified the serious nature of the inference which her conduct justified. The disclosure which this woman dreaded —who could doubt it now?—directly threatened Emily's peace of mind. There was no disguising it: the innocent niece was associated with an act of deception, which had been, until that day, the undetected secret of the aunt and the aunt's maid.

In this conclusion, and in this only, was to be found the rational explanation of Mrs. Ellmother's choice—placed between the alternatives of submitting to discovery by Emily, or of leaving the house.

Poor Miss Letitia's writing-table stood near the window of the sitting-room. Shrinking from the further pursuit of thoughts which might end in disposing her mind to distrust of her dying aunt, Emily looked round in search of some employ-

ment sufficiently interesting to absorb her attention. The writing table reminded her that she owed a letter to Cecilia. That helpful friend had surely the first claim to know why she had failed to keep her engagement with Sir Jervis Redwood.

After mentioning the telegram which had followed Mrs. Rook's arrival at the school, Emily's letter proceeded in these terms:—

"'"As soon as I had in some degree recovered myself, I informed Mrs. Rook of my aunt's serious illness.

"Although she carefully confined herself to commonplace expressions of sympathy, I could see that it was equally a relief to both of us to feel that we were prevented from being travelling companions. Don't suppose that I have taken a capricious dislike to Mrs. Rook—or that you are in any way to blame for the unfavourable impression which she has produced on me. I will make this

plain when we meet. In the mean while, I need only tell you that I gave her a letter of explanation to present to Sir Jervis Redwood. I also informed him of my address in London; adding a request that he would forward your letter, in case you have written to me before you receive these lines.

"Kind Mr. Alban Morris accompanied me to the railway-station, and arranged with the guard to take special care of me on the journey to London. We used to think him rather a heartless man. We were quite wrong. I don't know what his plans are for spending the summer holidays. Go where he may, I remember his kindness; my best wishes go with him.

"My dear, I must not sadden your enjoyment of your pleasant visit to the Engadine, by writing at any length of the sorrow that I am suffering. You know how I love

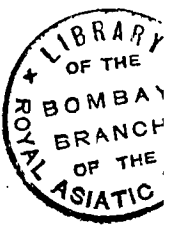
my aunt; and how gratefully I have always felt her motherly goodness to me. The doctor does not conceal the truth. At her age, there is no hope: my father's last-left relation, my one dearest friend, is dying.

"No! I must not forget that I have another friend—I must find some comfort in thinking of *you*.

"I do so long in my solitude for a letter from my dear Cecilia. Nobody comes to see me, when I most want sympathy; I am a stranger in this vast city. The members of my mother's family are settled in Australia: they have not even written to me, in all the long years that have passed since her death. You remember how cheerfully I used to look forward to my new life, on leaving school? Goodbye, my darling. While I can see your sweet face, in my thoughts, I don't des-

pair—dark as it looks now—of the future that is before me."

Emily had closed and addressed her letter, and was just rising from her chair, when she heard the voice of the new nurse at the door.



CHAPTER XV.

EMILY.

"MAY I say a word?" Mrs. Mosey inquired. She entered the room—pale and trembling. Seeing that ominous change, Emily dropped back into her chair.

"Dead?" she said faintly.

Mrs. Mosey looked at her in vacant surprise.

"I wished to say, Miss, that your aunt has frightened me."

Even that vague allusion was enough for Emily.

"You need say no more," she replied. "I know but too well how my aunt's mind is affected by the fever."

Confused and frightened as she was, Mrs. Mosey still found relief in her customary flow of words.

"Many and many a person have I nursed in fever," she announced. "Many and many a person have I heard say strange things. Never yet, Miss, in all my experience—!"

"Don't tell me of it!" Emily interposed.

"O, but I *must* tell you! In your own interests, Miss Emily—in your own interests. I won't be inhuman enough to leave you alone in the house to-night; but if this delirium goes on, I must ask you to get another nurse. Shocking suspicions are lying in wait for me in that bedroom, as it were. I can't resist them as I ought, if I go back again, and hear your aunt saying, what she has been saying for the last half hour and more. Mrs Ellmother has expected impossibilities of me; and

Mrs. Ellmother must take the consequences. I don't say she didn't warn me—speaking, you will please to understand, in the strictest confidence. 'Elizabeth,' she says, 'you know how wildly people talk, in Miss Letitia's present condition. Pay no heed to it,' she says. 'Let it go in at one ear and out at the other,' she says. 'If Miss Emily asks questions—you know nothing about it. If she's frightened—you know nothing about it. If she bursts into fits of crying that are dreadful to see, pity her, poor thing, but take no notice.' All very well, and sounds like speaking out, doesn't it? Nothing of the sort! Mrs. Ellmother warns me to expect this, that, and the other. But there is one horrid thing (which I heard, mind, over and over again at your aunt's bedside) that she does *not* prepare me for; and that horrid thing is —Murder!"

At that last word, Mrs. Mosey dropped her voice to a whisper—and waited to see what effect she had produced.

Sorely tried already by the cruel perplexities of her position, Emily's courage failed to resist the first sensation of horror, aroused in her by the climax of the nurse's hysterical narrative. Encouraged by her silence, Mrs. Mosey went on. She lifted one hand with theatrical solemnity—and luxuriously terrified herself with her own horrors.

"An inn, Miss Emily; a lonely inn, somewhere in the country; and a comfortless room at the inn, with a make-shift bed at one end of it, and a make-shift bed at the other—I give you my word of honour, that was how your aunt put it. She spoke of two men next; two men asleep (you understand) in the two beds. I think she called them 'gentlemen;' but I can't be sure,

and I wouldn't deceive you—you know I wouldn't deceive you, for the world. Miss Letitia muttered and mumbled, poor soul. I own I was getting tired of listening—when she burst out plain again, in that one horrid word—O, Miss, don't be impatient! don't interrupt me!"

Emily did interrupt, nevertheless. In some degree at least she had recovered herself. "No more of it!" she said—"I won't hear a word more."

But Mrs. Mosey was too resolutely bent on asserting her own importance, by making the most of the alarm that she had suffered, to be repressed by any ordinary method of remonstrance. Without paying the slightest attention to what Emily had said, she went on again more loudly and more excitably than ever.

"Listen, Miss—listen! The dreadful part of it is to come; you haven't heard about

the two gentlemen yet. One of them was murdered—what do you think of that!—and the other (I heard your aunt say it, in so many words) committed the crime. Did Miss Letitia fancy she was addressing a lot of people, when *you* were nursing her? She called out, like a person making public proclamation, when *I* was in her room. 'Whoever you are, good people' (she says), 'a hundred pounds reward, if you find the runaway murderer. Search everywhere for a poor weak womanish creature, with rings on his little white hands. There's nothing about him like a man, except his voice—a fine round voice. You'll know him, my friends—the wretch, the monster—you'll know him by his voice.' That was how she put it; I tell you again, that was how she put it. Did you hear her scream? Ah, my dear young lady, so much the better for you!

'O, the horrid murder' (she says)—'hush it up!' I'll take my Bible oath before the magistrate," cried Mrs. Mosey, starting out of her chair. "Your aunt said, 'Hush it up!'"

Emily crossed the room. The energy of her character was roused at last. She seized the foolish woman by the shoulders, forced her back in the chair, and looked her straight in the face, without uttering a word.

For the moment, Mrs. Mosey was petrified. She had fully expected—having reached the end of her terrible story—to find Emily at her feet, entreating her not to carry out her intention of leaving the cottage the next morning; and she had determined, after her sense of her own importance had been sufficiently flattered, to grant the prayer of the helpless young lady. Those were her anticipations

—and how had they been fulfilled? She had been treated like a mad women in a state of revolt!

"How dare you assault me?" she asked piteously. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. God knows I meant well."

"You are not the first person," Emily answered, quietly releasing her, "who has done wrong with the best intentions."

"I did my duty, Miss, when I told you what your aunt said."

"You forgot your duty when you listened to what my aunt said."

"Allow me to explain myself."

"No: not a word more on *that* subject shall pass between us. Remain here, if you please; I have something to suggest in your own interests. Wait, and compose yourself."

The purpose which had taken a foremost place in Emily's mind rested on the firm

foundation of her love and pity for her aunt.

Now that she had regained the power to think, she felt a hateful doubt pressed on her by Mrs. Mosey's disclosures. Having taken for granted that there was a foundation in truth for what she herself had heard in her aunt's room, could she reasonably resist the conclusion that there must be a foundation in truth for what Mrs. Mosey had heard, under similar circumstances?

There was but one way of escaping from this dilemma—and Emily deliberately took it. She turned her back on her own convictions; and persuaded herself that she had been in the wrong, when she had attached importance to anything that her aunt had said, under the influence of delirium. Having adopted this conclusion, she resolved to face the prospect of a night's solitude by the deathbed—rather

than permit Mrs. Mosey to have a second opportunity of drawing her own inferences from what she might hear in Miss Letitia's room.

"Do you mean to keep me waiting much longer, Miss?"

"Not a moment longer, now you are composed again," Emily answered. "I have been thinking of what has happened; and I fail to see any necessity for putting off your departure until the doctor comes to-morrow morning. There is really no objection to your leaving me to-night."

"I beg your pardon, Miss; there *is* an objection. I have already told you I can't reconcile it to my conscience to leave you here by yourself. I am not an inhuman woman," said Mrs. Mosey, putting her handkerchief to her eyes—smitten with pity for herself.

Emily tried the effect of a conciliatory

reply. "I am grateful for your kindness in offering to stay with me," she said.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," Mrs. Mosey answered ironically. "But for all that, you persist in sending me away."

"I persist in thinking that there is no necessity for my keeping you here until to-morrow."

"Oh, have it your own way! I am not reduced to forcing my company on anybody."

Mrs. Mosey put her handkerchief in her pocket, and asserted her dignity. With head erect and slowly-marching steps she walked out of the room. Emily was left in the cottage, alone with her dying aunt.

CHAPTER XVI.

MISS JETHRO.

A FORTNIGHT after the disappearance of Mrs. Ellmother, and the dismissal of Mrs. Mosey, Doctor Allday entered his consulting-room; punctual to the hour at which he was accustomed to receive patients.

An occasional wrinkling of his eyebrows, accompanied by an intermittent restlessness in his movements, appeared to indicate some disturbance of this worthy man's professional composure. His mind was indeed not at ease. Even the inexcitable old doctor had felt the attraction which had already conquered three such dissimilar people as Alban Morris, Cecilia Wyvil, and

Francine de Sor. He was thinking of Emily.

A ring at the door-bell announced the arrival of the first patient.

The servant introduced a tall lady, dressed simply and elegantly in dark apparel. Noticeable features, of a Jewish cast—worn and haggard, but still preserving their grandeur of form—were visible through her veil. She moved with grace and dignity; and she stated her object in consulting Doctor Allday with the ease of a well-bred woman.

"I come to ask your opinion, sir, on the state of my heart," she said; "and I am recommended by a patient, who has consulted you with advantage to herself." She placed a card on the doctor's writing-desk, and added: "I have become acquainted with the lady, by being one of the lodgers in her house."

The doctor recognised the name—and the usual proceedings ensued. After careful examination, he arrived at a favourable conclusion. "I may tell you at once," he said—"there is no reason to be alarmed about the state of your heart."

"I have never felt any alarm about myself," she answered quietly. "A sudden death is an easy death. If one's affairs are settled it seems, on that account, to be the death to prefer. My object was to settle *my* affairs—such as they are—if you had considered my life to be in danger. Is there nothing the matter with me?"

"I don't say that," the doctor replied. "The action of your heart is very feeble. Take the medicine that I shall prescribe; pay a little more attention to eating and drinking than ladies usually do; don't run up-stairs, and don't fatigue yourself by

violent exercise—and I see no reason why you shouldn't live to be an old woman."

"God forbid!" the lady said to herself. She turned away, and looked out of the window with a bitter smile.

Doctor Allday wrote his prescription. "Are you likely to make a long stay in London?" he asked.

"I am here for a little while only. Do you wish to see me again?"

"I should like to see you once more, before you go away—if you can make it convenient. What name shall I put on the prescription?"

"Miss Jethro."

"A remarkable name," the doctor said, in his matter-of-fact way.

Miss Jethro's bitter smile showed itself again. Without otherwise noticing what Doctor Allday had said, she laid the consultation fee on his table. At the same

moment, the footman appeared with a letter. "From Miss Emily Brown," he said. "No answer required."

He held the door open as he delivered the message; seeing that Miss Jethro was about to leave the room. She dismissed him by a gesture; and, returning to the table, pointed to the letter.

"Was your correspondent lately a pupil at Miss Ladd's school?" she inquired.

"My correspondent has just left Miss Ladd," the doctor answered. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"I am acquainted with her."

"You would be doing the poor child a kindness, if you would go and see her. She has no friends in London."

"Pardon me—she has an aunt."

"Her aunt died, a week since."

"Are there no other relations?"

"None. A melancholy state of things,

isn't it? She would have been absolutely alone in the house, if I had not sent one of my women servants to stay with her for the present. Did you know her father?"

Miss Jethro passed over the question, as if she had not heard it. "Has the young lady dismissed her aunt's servants?" she asked.

"Her aunt kept but one servant, ma'am. The woman has spared Miss Emily the trouble of dismissing her." He briefly alluded to Mrs. Ellmother's desertion of her mistress. "I can't explain it," he said when he had done "Can *you?*"

"What makes you think, sir, that I can help you? I have never even heard of the servant — and the mistress was a stranger to me."

At Doctor Allday's age a man is not easily discouraged by reproof, even when

it is administered by a handsome woman. "I thought you might have known Miss Emily's father," he persisted.

Miss Jethro rose, and wished him good-morning. "I must not occupy any more of your valuable time," she said.

"Suppose you wait a minute?" the doctor suggested.

Impenetrable as ever, he rang the bell. "Any patients in the waiting-room?" he inquired. "You see I have time to spare," he resumed, when the man had replied in the negative. "I take an interest in this poor girl; and I thought—"

"If you think that I take an interest in her, too," Miss Jethro interposed, "you are perfectly right.—I knew her father," she added abruptly; the allusion to Emily having apparently reminded her of the question which she had hitherto declined to notice.

"In that case," Doctor Allday proceeded, "I want a word of advice. Won't you sit down?"

She took a chair in silence. An irregular movement in the lower part of her veil seemed to indicate that she was breathing with difficulty. The doctor observed her with close attention. "Let me see my prescription again," he said. Having added an ingredient, he handed it back with a word of explanation. "Your nerves are more out of order than I supposed. The hardest disease to cure that I know of is—worry."

The hint could hardly have been plainer; but it was lost on Miss Jethro. Whatever her troubles might be, her medical adviser was not made acquainted with them. Quietly folding up the prescription, she reminded him that he had proposed to ask her advice.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" she inquired.

"I am afraid I must try your patience," the doctor acknowledged, "if I am to answer that question plainly."

With these prefatory words, he described the events that had followed Mrs. Mosey's appearance at the cottage. "I am only doing justice to this foolish woman," he continued, "when I tell you that she came here, after she had left Miss Emily, and did her best to set matters right. I went to the poor girl directly—and I felt it my duty, after looking at her aunt, not to leave her alone for that night. When I got home, the next morning, whom do you think I found waiting for me? Mrs. Ellmother!"

He stopped—in the expectation that Miss Jethro would express some surprise. Not a word passed her lips.

"Mrs. Ellmother's object was to ask how her mistress was going on," the doctor proceeded. "Every day, while Miss Letitia still lived, she came here to make the same inquiry—without a word of explanation. On the day of the funeral, there she was at the church, dressed in deep mourning; and, as I can personally testify, crying bitterly. When the ceremony was over—can you believe it?—she slipped away, before Miss Emily or I could speak to her. We have seen nothing more of her, and heard nothing more, from that time to this."

He stopped again. The silent lady still listened without making any remark.

"Have you no opinion to express?" the doctor asked bluntly.

"I am waiting," Miss Jethro answered.

"Waiting—for what?"

"I haven't heard yet, why you want my advice."

Doctor Allday's observation of humanity had hitherto reckoned want of caution among the deficient moral qualities in the natures of women. He set down Miss Jethro as a remarkable exception to a general rule.

"I want you to advise me as to the right course to take with Miss Emily," he said. "She has assured me she attaches no serious importance to her aunt's wanderings, when the poor old lady's fever was at its worst. I don't doubt that she speaks the truth—but I have my own reasons for being afraid that she is deceiving herself. Will you bear this in mind?"

"Yes—if it's necessary."

"In plain words, Miss Jethro, you think I am still wandering from the point. I have got to the point. Yesterday, Miss Emily told me that she hoped to be soon composed enough to examine the papers left by her aunt."

Miss Jethro suddenly turned in her chair, and looked at Doctor Allday.

"Are you beginning to feel interested?" the doctor asked mischievously.

She neither acknowledged nor denied it. "Go on"—was all she said.

"I don't know how *you* feel," he proceeded; "*I* am afraid of the discoveries which she may make; and I am strongly tempted to advise her to leave the proposed examination to her aunt's lawyer. Is there anything in your knowledge of Miss Emily's late father, which tells you that I am right?"

"Before I reply," said Miss Jethro, "it may not be amiss to let the young lady speak for herself."

"How is she to do that?" the doctor asked.

Miss Jethro pointed to the writing-table. "Look there," she said. "You have not yet opened Miss Emily's letter."

CHAPTER XVII.

DOCTOR ALLDAY.

ABSORBED in the effort to overcome his patient's reserve, the doctor had forgotten Emily's letter. He opened it immediately.

After reading the first sentence, he looked up with an expression of annoyance. "She has begun the examination of the papers already," he said.

"Then I can be of no further use to you," Miss Jethro rejoined. She made a second attempt to leave the room.

Doctor Allday turned to the next page of the letter. "Stop!" he cried. "She has found something—and here it is."

He held up a small printed Handbill,

which had been placed between the first and second pages. "Suppose you look at it?" he said.

"Whether I am interested in it or not?" Miss Jethro asked.

"You may be interested in what Miss Emily says about it in her letter."

"Do you propose to show me her letter?"

"I propose to read it to you."

Miss Jethro took the Handbill without further objection. It was expressed in these words:—

"MURDER. £100 REWARD.—Whereas a murder was committed on the thirtieth September, 1877, at the Hand-in-Hand Inn, in the village of Zeeland, Hampshire, the above reward will be paid to any person or persons whose exertions shall lead to the arrest and conviction of the suspected murderer. Name not known. Supposed age, between twenty and thirty years. A

well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers. Small white well-shaped hands. Wore valuable rings on the two last fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly in a dark-grey tourist's suit. Carried a knapsack, as if on a pedestrian excursion. Remarkably good voice, smooth, full, and persuasive. Ingratiating manners. Apply to the Chief Inspector; Metropolitan Police Office, London."

Miss Jethro laid aside the handbill without any visible appearance of agitation. The doctor took up Emily's letter, and read as follows:

"'You will be as much relieved as I was my kind friend, when you look at the paper enclosed. I found it loose in a blank book with cuttings from newspapers, and odd an

nouncements of lost property and other curious things (all huddled together between the leaves), which my aunt no doubt intended to set in order and fix in their proper places. She must have been thinking of her book, poor soul, in her last illness. Here is the origin of those 'terrible words' which frightened stupid Mrs. Mosey! Is it not encouraging to have discovered such a confirmation of my opinion as this? I feel a new interest in looking over the papers that still remain to be examined—"

Before he could get to the end of the sentence Miss Jethro's agitation broke through her reserve.

"Do what you proposed to do!" she burst out vehemently. "Stop her at once from carrying her examination any further! If she hesitates, insist on it!"

At last Doctor Allday had triumphed!

"It has been a long time coming," he remarked, in his cool way; "and it's all the more welcome on that account. You dread the discoveries she may make, Miss Jethro, as I do. And *you* know what those discoveries may be."

"What I do know, or don't know, is of no importance," she answered sharply.

"Excuse me, it is of very serious importance. I have no authority over this poor girl—I am not even an old friend. You tell me to insist. Help me to declare honestly that I know of circumstances which justify me; and I may insist to some purpose."

Miss Jethro lifted her veil for the first time, and eyed him searchingly.

"I believe I can trust you," she said. "Now listen! The one consideration on which I consent to open my lips, is consideration for Miss Emily's tranquillity.

Promise me absolute secrecy, on your word of honour."

He gave the promise.

"I want to know one thing, first," Miss Jethro proceeded. "Did she tell you—as she once told me—that her father had died of heart-complaint?"

"Yes."

"Did you put any questions to her?"

"I asked how long ago it was."

"And she told you?"

"She told me."

"You wish to know, Doctor Allday, what discoveries Miss Emily may yet make, among her aunt's papers. Judge for yourself, when I tell you that she has been deceived about her father's death."

"Do you mean that he is still living?"

"I mean that she has been deceived—purposely deceived—about the *manner* of his death."

"Who was the wretch who did it?"

"You are wronging the dead, sir! The truth can only have been concealed out of the purest motives of love and pity. I don't desire to disguise the conclusion at which I have arrived, after what I have heard from yourself. The person responsible must be Miss Emily's aunt—and the old servant must have been in her confidence. Remember! You are bound in honour not to repeat to any living creature what I have just said."

The doctor followed Miss Jethro to the door. "You have not yet told me," he said, "*how* her father died."

"I have no more to tell you."

With those words she left him.

He rang for his servant. To wait until the hour at which he was accustomed to go out, might be to leave Emily's peace of mind at the mercy of an accident. "I

am going to the cottage," he said. "If anybody wants me, I shall be back in a quarter of an hour."

On the point of leaving the house, he remembered that Emily would probably expect him to return the Handbill. As he took it up, the first lines caught his eye: he read the date at which the murder had been committed, for the second time. On a sudden the ruddy colour left his face.

"Good God!" he cried, "her father was murdered—and that woman was concerned in it."

Following the impulse that urged him, he secured the Handbill in his pocket-book—snatched up the card which his patient had presented as her introduction—and instantly left the house. He called the first cab that passed him, and drove to Miss Jethro's lodgings.

"Gone"—was the servant's answer when

he inquired for her. He insisted on speaking to the landlady. "Hardly ten minutes have passed," he said, "since she left my house."

"Hardly ten minutes have passed," the landlady replied, "since that message was brought here by a boy."

The message had been evidently written in great haste: "I am unexpectedly obliged to leave London. A bank-note is enclosed in payment of my debt to you. I will send for my luggage."

The doctor withdrew.

"Unexpectedly obliged to leave London," he repeated, as he got into the cab again. "Her flight condemns her: not a doubt of it now. As fast as you can!" he shouted to the man; directing him to drive to Emily's cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISS LADD.

ARRIVING at the cottage, Doctor Allday discovered a gentleman who was just closing the garden gate behind him.

"Has Miss Emily had a visitor?" he inquired, when the servant admitted him.

"The gentleman left a letter for Miss Emily, sir."

"Did he ask to see her?"

"He asked after Miss Letitia's health. When he heard that she was dead, he seemed to be startled, and went away immediately."

"Did he give his name?"

"No, sir."

The doctor found Emily absorbed over

her letter. His anxiety to forestall any possible discovery of the deception, which had concealed the terrible story of her father's death, kept Doctor Allday's vigilance on the watch. He doubted the gentleman who had abstained from giving his name; he even distrusted the other unknown person who had written to Emily.

She looked up. Her face relieved him of his misgivings, before she could speak.

"At last, I have heard from my dearest friend," she said. "You remember what I told you about Cecilia? Here is a letter—a long delightful letter—from the Engadine, left at the door by some gentleman unknown. I was questioning the servant when you rang the bell."

"You may question me, if you prefer it. I arrived just as the gentleman was shutting your garden gate."

"Oh, tell me! what was he like?"

"Tall, and thin, and dark. Wore a vile republican-looking felt hat. Had nasty ill-tempered wrinkles between his eyebrows. The sort of man I distrust by instinct."

"Why?"

"Because he doesn't shave."

"Do you mean that he wore a beard?"

"Yes; a curly black beard."

Emily clasped her hands in amazement. "Can it be Alban Morris?" she exclaimed.

The doctor looked at her with a sardonic smile; he thought it likely that he had discovered her sweetheart.

"Who is Mr. Alban Morris?" he asked.

"The drawing master at Miss Ladd's school."

Doctor Allday dropped the subject: masters at ladies' schools were not persons who interested him. He returned to the purpose which had brought him to the

cottage—and produced the Handbill that had been sent to him in Emily's letter.

"I suppose you want to have it back again?" he said.

She took it from him, and looked at it with interest.

"Isn't it strange," she suggested, "that the murderer should have escaped, with such a careful description of him as this circulated all over England?"

She read the description to the doctor.

"Name not known. Supposed age between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half whiskers. Small, white, well-shaped hands. Wore valuable rings on the two last fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly——"

"That part of the description is useless,"

the doctor remarked; "he would change his clothes."

"But could he change his voice?" Emily objected. "Listen to this: 'Remarkably good voice; smooth, full, and persuasive.' And here again! 'Ingratiating manners.' Perhaps you will say he could put on an appearance of rudeness?"

"I will say this, my dear. He would be able to disguise himself so effectually that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would fail to identify him, either by his voice or his manner."

"How?"

"Look back at the description: 'Hair cut rather short; clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half whiskers.' The wretch was safe from pursuit; he had ample time at his disposal—don't you see how he could completely alter the appearance of his head and face? No more, my

dear, of this disagreeable subject! Let us get to something interesting Have you found anything else among your aunt's papers?"

"I have met with a great disappointment," Emily replied. "Did I tell you how I discovered the Handbill?"

"No."

"I found it, with the scrap-book and the newspaper-cuttings, under a collection of empty boxes and bottles, in a drawer of the washhand-stand. And I naturally expected to make far more interesting discoveries in this room. My search was over in five minutes. Nothing in the cabinet there, in the corner, but a few books and some china. Nothing in the writing-desk, on that side-table, but a packet of note-paper and some sealing-wax. Nothing here, in the drawers, but tradesmen's receipts, materials for knitting, and old photographs. She must

have destroyed all her papers, poor dear, before her last illness; and the Handbill and the other things can only have escaped, because they were left in a place which she never thought of examining. Isn't it provoking?"

With a mind inexpressibly relieved, good doctor Allday asked permission to return to his patients; leaving Emily to devote herself to her friend's letter.

On his way out, he noticed that the door of the bed-chamber on the opposite side of the passage stood open. Since Miss Letitia's death the room had not been used. Well within view stood the washhand-stand to which Emily had alluded. The doctor advanced to the house door—reflected—hesitated—and looked towards the empty room.

It had struck him that there might be a second drawer which Emily had overlooked.

Would he be justified in setting this doubt at rest? If he passed over ordinary scruples it would not be without excuse. Miss Letitia had spoken to him of her affairs, and had asked him to act (in Emily's interests), as co-executor with her lawyer. The rapid progress of the illness had made it impossible for her to execute the necessary codicil. But the doctor had been morally (if not legally) taken into her confidence—and, for that reason, he decided that he had a right in this serious matter to satisfy his own mind.

A glance was enough to show him that no second drawer had been overlooked.

There was no other discovery to detain the doctor. The wardrobe only contained the poor old lady's clothes; the one cupboard was open and empty. On the point of leaving the room, he went back to the wash-hand-stand. While he had the opportunity,

it might not be amiss to make sure that Emily had thoroughly examined those old boxes and bottles, which she had alluded to with some little contempt.

The drawer was of considerable length. When he tried to pull it completely out from the grooves in which it ran, it resisted him. In his present frame of mind, this was a suspicious circumstance in itself. He cleared away the litter so as to make room for the introduction of his hand and arm into the drawer. In another moment his fingers touched a piece of paper, jammed between the inner end of the drawer and the bottom of the flat surface of the washhand-stand. With a little care, he succeeded in extricating the paper. Only pausing to satisfy himself that there was nothing else to be found, and to close the drawer after replacing its contents, he left the cottage.

The cab was waiting for him. On the

drive back to his own house, he opened the crumpled paper.

It proved to be a letter addressed to Miss Letitia; and it was signed by no less a person than Emily's schoolmistress. Looking back from the end to the beginning, Doctor Allday discovered, in the first sentence, the name of—Miss Jethro.

But for the interview of that morning with his patient, he might have doubted the propriety of making himself further acquainted with the letter. As things were, he read it without hesitation.

"DEAR MADAM,—I cannot but regard it as a providential circumstance that your niece, in writing to you from my house, should have mentioned among other events of her school life, the arrival of my new teacher, Miss Jethro.

"To say that I was surprised is to express very inadequately what I felt when I read

your letter, informing me confidentially that I had employed a woman who was unworthy to associate with the young persons placed under my care. It is impossible for me to suppose that a lady in your position, and possessed of your high principles, would make such a serious accusation as this, without unanswerable reasons for doing so. At the same time I cannot, consistently with my duty as a Christian, suffer my opinion of Miss Jethro to be in any way modified, until proofs are laid before me which it is impossible to dispute.

"Placing the same confidence in your discretion, which you have placed in mine, I now enclose the references and testimonials which Miss Jethro submitted to me, when she presented herself to fill the vacant situation in my school.

"I earnestly request you to lose no time in instituting the confidential inquiries which

you have volunteered to make. Whatever the result may be, pray return to me the enclosures which I have trusted to your care, and believe me, dear Madam, in much suspense and anxiety, sincerely yours,

"AMELIA LADD."

It is needless to describe, at any length, the impression which these lines produced on the doctor.

If he had heard, what Emily had heard at the time of her aunt's last illness, he would have called to mind Miss Letitia's betrayal of her interest in some man unknown, whom she believed to have been beguiled by Miss Jethro—and he would have perceived that the vindictive hatred, thus produced, must have inspired the letter of denunciation which the schoolmistress had acknowledged. He would also have inferred that Miss Letitia's inquiries had proved her accusation to be well

founded—if he had known of the new teacher's sudden dismissal from the school. As things were, he was merely confirmed in his bad opinion of Miss Jethro; and he was induced, on reflection, to keep his discovery to himself.

"If poor Miss Emily saw the old lady exhibited in the character of an informer," he thought, "what a blow would be struck at her innocent respect for the memory of her aunt!"

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CHAPTER XIX.

SIR JERVIS REDWOOD.

In the meantime, Emily, left by herself, had her own correspondence to occupy her attention.

Besides the letter from Cecilia (directed to the care of Sir Jervis Redwood), she had received some lines addressed to her by Sir Jervis himself. The two enclosures had been secured in a sealed envelope, directed to the cottage.

If Alban Morris had been indeed the person trusted as messenger by Sir Jervis, the conclusion that followed filled Emily with overpowering emotions of curiosity and surprise.

Having no longer the motive of serving

and protecting her, Alban must, nevertheless, have taken the journey to Northumberland. He must have gained Sir Jervis Redwood's favour and confidence—and he might even have been a guest at the baronet's country seat—when Cecilia's letter arrived. What did it mean?

Emily looked back at her experience of her last day at school, and recalled her consultation with Alban on the subject of Mrs. Rook. Was he still bent on clearing up his suspicions of Sir Jervis's housekeeper? And, with that end in view, had he followed the woman, on her return to her master's place of abode?

Suddenly, almost irritably, Emily snatched up Sir Jervis's letter. Before the doctor had come in, she had glanced at it, and had thrown it aside in her impatience to read what Cecilia had written. In her present altered frame of mind, she was

inclined to think that Sir Jervis might be the more interesting correspondent of the two.

On returning to his letter, she was disappointed at the outset.

In the first place, his handwriting was so abominably bad that she was obliged to guess at his meaning. In the second place, he never hinted at the circumstances under which Cecilia's letter had been confided to the gentleman who had left it at her door.

She would once more have treated the baronet's communication with contempt—but for the discovery that it contained an offer of employment in London, addressed to herself.

Sir Jervis had necessarily been obliged to engage another secretary in Emily's absence. But he was still in want of a person to serve his literary interests in London. He had reason to believe that

discoveries [redacted] made by modern travellers in Central Americ[redacted], had been reported from time to time by th[redacted]e English press; and he wished copies to be [redacted] taken of any notices of this sort which might [redacted] be found, on referring to the files of newsp[redacted]apers kept in the reading-room of the British [redacted] Museum. If Emily considered herself capable [redacted]f contributing in this way to the complete[redacted]ness of his great work on "the ruined cities, [redacted]," she had only to apply to his bookseller in London, who would pay her the customary remuneration, and give her every assistance of which she might stand in need. The bookseller's name and address followed (with nothing legible but the two words, "Bond Street,"); and there was an end of Sir Jervis's proposal.

Emily laid it aside, deferring her answer until she had read Cecilia's letter.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVEREND MILES MIRABEL.

"I AM making a little excursion from the Engadine, my dearest of all dear friends. Two charming fellow-travellers take care of me; and we may perhaps get as far as the Lake of Como.

"My sister (already much improved in health) remains at St. Moritz with the old governess. The moment I know what exact course we are going to take, I shall write to Julia to forward any letters which arrive in my absence. My life, in this earthly paradise, will be only complete when I hear from my darling Emily.

"In the meantime, we are staying for the

night at some interesting place, the name of which I have unaccountably forgotten; and here I am in my room, writing to you at last—dying to know if Sir Jervis has yet thrown himself at your feet, and offered to make you Lady Redwood with magnificent settlements.

"But you are waiting to hear who my new friends are. My dear, one of them is, next to yourself, the most delightful creature in existence. Society knows her as Lady Janeaway. I love her already, by her Christian name; she is my friend Doris. And she reciprocates my sentiments.

"You will now understand that union of sympathies made us acquainted with each other.

"If there is anything in me to be proud of, I think it must be my admirable appetite. And, if I have a passion, the name of it is Pastry. Here again, Lady

Doris reciprocates my sentiments. We sit next to each other at the *table d'hôte*.

"Good heavens, I have forgotten her husband! They have been married rather more than a month. Did I tell you that she is just two years older than I am?

"I declare I am forgetting him again! He is Lord Janeaway. Such a quiet modest man, and so easily amused. He carries with him everywhere a dirty little tin case, with air holes in the cover. He goes softly poking about among bushes and brambles, and under rocks, and behind old wooden houses. When he has caught some hideous insect that makes one shudder, he blushes with pleasure, and looks at his wife and me, and says, with the prettiest lisp: 'This is what I call enjoying the day.' To see the manner in which he obeys Her is, between ourselves, to feel proud of being a woman.

"Where was I? Oh! at the *table d'hôte*.

"Never, Emily—I say it with a solemn sense of the claims of truth—never have I eaten such an infamous abominable maddeningly bad dinner, as the dinner they gave us on our first day at the hotel. I ask you if I am not patient; I appeal to your own recollection of occasions when I have exhibited extraordinary self-control. My dear, I held out until they brought the pastry round. I took one bite, and committed the most shocking offence against good manners at t[redacted]hat you can imagine. My handkerchief, [redacted]poor innocent handkerchief, received the horrid—please suppose the rest. My hair stands on end, when I think of it. Our neighbours at the table saw me. The coarse men l[redacted]ughed. The sweet young bride sincerel[redacted]ing for me, said, 'Will you allow [redacted]o shake hands? I did exactly what [redacted] have done the day before

yesterday.' Such was the beginning of my friendship with Lady Doris Janeaway.

"We are two resolute women—I mean that *she* is resolute, and that I follow her—and we have asserted our right of dining to our own satisfaction, by means of an interview with the chief cook.

"This interesting person is an ex-Zouave in the French army. Instead of making excuses, he confessed that the barbarous tastes of the English and American visitors had so discouraged him, that he had lost all pride and pleasure in the exercise of his art. As an example of what he meant, he mentioned his experience of two young Englishmen who could speak no foreign language. The waiters reported that they objected to their breakfasts, and especially to the eggs. Thereupon (to translate the Frenchman's own way of putting it) he adjusted himself in exquisite preparation to the eggs.

Eggs à la tripe, au gratin, à l'Aurore, à la Dauphine, à la Poulette, à la Tartare, à la Venitienne, à la Bordelaise, and so on, and so on. Still, the two young gentlemen were not satisfied. The ex-Zouave, infuriated, wounded in his honour, disgraced as a professor, insisted on an explanation. What, in heaven's name, *did* they want for breakfast? They wanted boiled eggs; and a fish which they called a *Bloaterre*. It was impossible, he said, to express his contempt for the English idea of a breakfast, in the presence of ladies. You know how a cat expresses herself in the presence of a dog—and you will understand the allusion. Oh, Emily, what dinners we have had, in our own room, since we spoke to that noble cook!

"Have I any more news to send to you? Are you interested, my dear, in eloquent young clergymen?

"On our first appearance at the public table we noticed a remarkable air of depression among the ladies. Had some adventurous gentleman tried to climb a mountain, and failed? Had disastrous political news arrived from England; a defeat of the Conservatives, for instance? Had a revolution in the fashions broken out in Paris, and had all our best dresses become of no earthly value to us? I applied for information to the only lady present who shone on the company with a cheerful face —my friend Doris, of course.

"'What day was yesterday?' she asked.

"'Sunday,' I answered.

"'Of all melancholy Sundays,' she continued, 'the most melancholy in the calendar. Mr. Miles Mirabel preached his farewell sermon, in our temporary chapel upstairs.'

"'And you have not recovered it yet?'

"'We are all heart-broken, Miss Wyvil.'

"This naturally interested me. I asked what sort of sermons Mr. Mirabel preached. Lady Janeaway said: 'Come up to our room after dinner. The subject is too distressing to be discussed in public.'

"She began by making me personally acquainted with the reverend gentleman—that is to say, she showed me the photographic portraits of him. They were two in number. One only presented his face. The other exhibited him at full length, adorned in his surplice. Every lady in the congregation had received the two photographs as a farewell present. 'My portraits,' Lady Doris remarked, 'are the only complete specimens. The others have been irretrievably ruined by tears.'

"You will now expect a personal description of this fascinating man. What the photographs failed to tell me, my friend was so kind as to complete from the resources

of her own experience. Here is the result presented to the best of my ability.

"He is young—not yet thirty years of age. His complexion is fair; his features are delicate; his eyes are clear blue. He has pretty hands, and rings prettier still. And such a voice, and such manners! You will say there are plenty of pet parsons who answer to this description. Wait a little — I have kept his chief distinction till the last. His beautiful light hair flows in profusion over his shoulders; and his glossy beard waves, at apostolic length, down to the lower buttons of his waistcoat.

"What do you think of the Reverend Miles Mirabel now?

"The life and adventures of our charming young clergyman, bear eloquent testimony to the saintly patience of his disposition, under trials which would have overwhelmed an

ordinary man. (Lady Doris, please notice, quotes in this place the language of his admirers; and I report Lady Doris.)

"He has been clerk in a lawyer's office—unjustly dismissed. He has given readings from Shakespeare—infamously neglected. He has been secretary to a promenade concert company—deceived by a penniless manager. He has been employed in negotiations for making foreign railways—repudiated by an unprincipled Government. He has been translator to a publishing house—declared incapable by envious newspapers and reviews. He has taken refuge in dramatic criticism—dismissed by a corrupt editor. Through all these means of purification for the priestly career, he passed at last into the one sphere that was worthy of him: he entered the Church, under the protection of influential friends. Oh, happy change! From that moment his labours have been

blest. Twice already, he has been presented with silver tea-pots filled with sovereigns. Go where he may, precious sympathies environ him; and domestic affection places his knife and fork at innumerable family tables. After a continental career, which will leave undying recollections, he is now recalled to England—at the suggestion of a person of distinction in the Church, who prefers a mild climate. It will now be his valued privilege to represent an absent rector in a country living; remote from cities, secluded in pastoral solitude, among simple breeders of sheep. May the shepherd prove worthy of the flock!

"Here again, my dear, I must give the merit where the merit is due. This Memoir of Mr. Mirabel is not of my writing. It formed part of his farewell sermon, preserved in the memory of Lady Doris—and it shows (once more in the language of his admirers) that the

truest humility may be found in the character of the most gifted man.

"Let me only add, that you will have opportunities of seeing and hearing this popular preacher, when circumstances permit him to address congregations in the large towns. I am at the end of my news; and I begin to feel—after this long, long letter—that it is time to go to bed. Need I say that I have often spoken of you to Doris, and that she entreats you to be her friend as well as mine, when we meet again in England?

"Good-bye, darling, for the present. With fondest love,

"Your CECILIA."

"P.S.—I have formed a new habit. In case of feeling hungry in the night, I keep a box of chocolate under the pillow. You have no idea what a comfort it is. If I ever meet with the man who fulfils my

ideal, I shall make it a condition of the marriage settlement, that I am to have chocolate under the pillow."

CHAPTER XXI.

POLLY AND SALLY.

WITHOUT a care to trouble her; abroad or at home, finding inexhaustible varieties of amusement; seeing new places, making new acquaintances—what a disheartening contrast did Cecilia's happy life present to the life of her friend! Who, in Emily's position, could have read that joyously-written letter from Switzerland, and not have lost heart and faith, for the moment at least, as the inevitable result?

A buoyant temperament is of all moral qualities the most precious, in this respect; it is the one force in us—when virtuous resolution proves insufficient—which resists

by instinct the stealthy approaches of despair. "I shall only cry," Emily thought, "if I stay at home; better go out."

Observant persons, accustomed to frequent the London Parks, can hardly have failed to notice the number of solitary strangers sadly endeavouring to vary their lives by taking a walk. They linger about the flower-beds; they sit for hours on the benches; they look with patient curiosity at other people who have companions; they notice ladies on horseback and children at play, with submissive interest; some of the men find company in a pipe, without appearing to enjoy it; some of the women find a substitute for dinner, in little dry biscuits wrapped in crumpled scraps of paper; they are not sociable; they are hardly ever seen to make acquaintance with each other; perhaps they are shame-faced, or proud, or sullen; perhaps they despair of others,

being accustomed to despair of themselves; perhaps they have their reasons for never venturing to encounter curiosity, or their vices which dread detection, or their virtues which suffer hardship with the resignation that is sufficient for itself. The one thing certain is, that these unfortunate people resist discovery. We know that they are strangers in London — and we know no more.

And Emily was one of them.

Among the other forlorn wanderers in the Parks, there appeared latterly a trim little figure in black (with the face protected from notice behind a crape veil), which was beginning to be familiar, day after day, to nursemaids and children, and to rouse curiosity among harmless solitaries meditating on benches, and idle vagabonds strolling over the grass. The woman-servant, whom the considerate doctor had provided,

was the one person in Emily's absence left to take care of the house. There was no other creature who could be a companion to the friendless girl. Mrs. Ellmother had never shown herself again since the funeral. Mrs. Mosey could not forget that she had been (no matter how politely) requested to withdraw. To whom could Emily say, "Let us go out for a walk?" She had communicated the news of her aunt's death to Miss Ladd, at Brighton; and had heard from Francine. The worthy schoolmistress had written to her with the truest kindness. "Choose your own time, my poor child, and come and stay with me at Brighton; the sooner the better." Emily shrank—not from accepting the invitation—but from encountering Francine. The hard West Indian heiress looked harder than ever with a pen in her hand. Her letter announced that she was "getting on wretchedly

with her studies (which she hated); she found the masters appointed to instruct her ugly and disagreeable (and loathed the sight of them); she had taken a dislike to Miss Ladd (and time only confirmed that unfavourable impression); Brighton was always the same; the sea was always the same; the drives were always the same. Francine felt a presentiment that she should do something desperate, unless Emily joined her, and made Brighton endurable behind the horrid schoolmistress's back." Solitude in London was a privilege and a pleasure, viewed as the alternative to such companionship as this. Emily wrote gratefully to Miss Ladd, and asked to be excused.

Other days had passed drearily since that time; but the one day that had brought with it Cecilia's letter set past happiness and present sorrow together so vividly and so cruelly that Emily's courage sank.

She had forced back the tears, in her lonely home; she had gone out to seek consolation and encouragement under the sunny sky—to find comfort for her sore heart in the radiant summer beauty of flowers and grass, in the sweet breathing of the air, in the happy heavenward soaring of the birds. No! Mother Nature is step mother to the sick at heart. Soon, too soon, she could hardly see where she went. Again and again she resolutely cleared her eyes, under the shelter of her veil, when passing strangers noticed her; and again and again the tears found their way back. Oh, if the girls at the school were to see her now—the girls who used to say in their moments of sadness, "Let us go to Emily and be cheered"—would they know her again? She sat down to rest and recover herself on the nearest bench. It was unoccupied. No passing footsteps were audible on the

remote path to which she had strayed. Solitude at home! Solitude in the Park! Where was Cecilia at that moment? In Italy, among the lakes and mountains, happy in the company of her light-hearted friend.

The lonely interval passed, and persons came near. Two sisters, girls like herself, stopped to rest on the bench.

They were full of their own interests; they hardly looked at the stranger in mourning garments. The younger sister was to be married, and the elder was to be bridesmaid. They talked of their dresses and their presents; they compared the dashing bridegroom of one with the timid lover of the other; they laughed over their own small sallies of wit, over their joyous dreams of the future, over their opinions of the guests invited to the wedding. Too joyfully restless to remain inactive any longer,

they jumped up again from the seat. One of them said, "Polly, I'm too happy!" and danced as she walked away. The other cried, "Sally, for shame!" and laughed, as if she had hit on the most irresistible joke that ever was made.

Emily rose, and went home.

By some mysterious influence which she was unable to trace, the boisterous merriment of the two girls had roused in her a sense of revolt against the life that she was leading. Change, speedy change, to some occupation that would force her to exert herself, presented the one promise of brighter days that she could see. To feel this was to be inevitably reminded of Sir Jervis Redwood. Here was a man, who had never even seen her, transformed by the incomprehensible operation of Chance into the friend of whom she stood in need—the friend who pointed the way to a new world of action, the

busy world of readers in the library of the Museum.

Early in the new week, Emily had accepted Sir Jervis's proposal, and had so interested the bookseller to whom she had been directed to apply, that he took it on himself to modify the arbitrary instructions of his employer.

"The old gentleman has no mercy on himself, and no mercy on others," he explained, "where his literary labours are concerned. You must spare yourself, Miss Emily. It is not only absurd, it's cruel, to expect you to ransack old newspapers for discoveries in Yucatan, from the time when Stephens published his *Travels in Central America*—nearly forty years since! Begin with back numbers, published within a few years—say five years from the present date—and let us see what your search over that interval will bring forth."

Accepting this friendly advice, Emily began with the newspaper-volume dating from New Year's Day, 1876.

The first hour of her search strengthened the sincere sense of gratitude with which she remembered the bookseller's kindness. To keep her attention steadily fixed on the one subject that interested her employer, and to resist the temptation to read those miscellaneous items of news which especially interest women, put her patience and resolution to a merciless test. Happily for herself, her neighbours on either side were no idlers. To see them so absorbed over their work that they never once looked at her, after the first moment when she took her place between them, was to find exactly the example of which she stood most in need. As the hours wore on, she pursued her weary way, down one column and up another, resigned at least (if not quite recon-

ciled yet) to her task. Her labours ended, for the day, with such encouragement as she might derive from the conviction of having, thus far, honestly pursued an useless search.

News was waiting for her when she reached home, which raised her sinking spirits.

On leaving the cottage that morning she had given certain instructions, relating to the modest stranger who had taken charge of her correspondence—in case of his paying a second visit, during her absence at the Museum. The first words spoken by the servant, on opening the door, informed her that the unknown gentleman had called again. This time, he had boldly left his card. There was the welcome name that she had expected to see—Alban Morris.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALBAN MORRIS.

HAVING looked at the card, Emily put her first question to the servant.

"Did you tell Mr. Morris what your orders were?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss; I said I was to have shown him in, if you had been at home. Perhaps I did wrong; I told him what you told me when you went out this morning—I said you had gone to read at the Museum."

"What makes you think you did wrong?"

"Well, Miss, he didn't say anything, but he looked upset."

"Do you mean that he looked angry?"

The servant shook her head. "Not exactly angry—puzzled and put out."

"Did he leave any message?"

"He said he would call later, if you would be so good as to receive him."

In half an hour more, Alban and Emily were together again. The light fell full on her face as she rose to receive him.

"Oh, how you have suffered!"

The words escaped him before he could restrain himself. He looked at her with the tender sympathy, so precious to women, which she had not seen in the face of any human creature since the loss of her aunt. Even the good doctor's efforts to console her had been efforts of professional routine —the inevitable result of his life-long familiarity with sorrow and death. While Alban's eyes rested on her, Emily felt her tears rising. In the fear that he might misinterpret her reception of him, she made an effort to speak with some appearance of composure.

"I lead a lonely life," she said; "and I can well understand that my face shows it. You are one of my very few friends, Mr. Morris"—the tears rose again; it discouraged her to see him standing irresolute, with his hat in his hand, fearful of intruding on her. "Indeed, indeed, you are welcome," she said, very earnestly.

In those sad days her heart was easily touched. She gave him her hand for the second time. He held it gently for a moment. Every day since they had parted she had been in his thoughts; she had become dearer to him than ever. He was too deeply affected to trust himself to answer. That silence pleaded for him as nothing had pleaded for him yet. In her secret self she remembered with wonder how she had received his confession in the school garden. It was a little hard on him, surely, to have forbidden him even to hope.

Conscious of her own weakness—even while giving way to it—she felt the necessity of turning his attention from herself. In some confusion, she pointed to a chair at her side, and spoke of his first visit, when he had left her letters at the door. Having confided to him all that she had discovered, and all that she had guessed, on that occasion, it was by an easy transition that she alluded next to the motive for his journey to the North.

"I thought it might be suspicion of Mrs. Rook," she said. "Was I mistaken?"

"No; you were right."

"They were serious suspicions, I suppose?"

"Certainly! I should not otherwise have devoted my holiday-time to clearing them up."

"May I know what they were?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he began.

"But you would rather not answer my question," she interposed.

"I would rather hear you tell me if you have made any other guess."

"One more, Mr. Morris. I guessed that you had become acquainted with Sir Jervis Redwood."

"For the second time, Miss Emily, you have arrived at a sound conclusion. My one hope of finding opportunities for observing Sir Jervis's housekeeper depended on my chance of gaining admission to Sir Jervis's house."

"How did you succeed? Perhaps you provided yourself with a letter of introduction?"

"I knew nobody who could introduce me," Alban replied. "As the event proved, a letter would have been needless. Sir Jervis introduced himself—and, more wonderful still, he invited me to his house at our first interview."

"Sir Jervis introduced himself?" Emily

repeated, in amazement. "From Cecilia's description of him, I should have thought he was the last person in the world to do that!"

Alban smiled. "And you would like to know how it happened?" he suggested.

"The very favour I was going to ask of you," she replied.

Instead of at once complying with her wishes, he paused—hesitated—and made a strange request. "Will you forgive my rudeness, if I ask leave to walk up and down the room while I talk? I am a restless man. Walking up and down helps me to express myself freely."

Her face brightened for the first time. "How like You that is!" she exclaimed.

Alban looked at her with surprise and delight. She had betrayed an interest in studying his character, which he appreciated at its full value. "I should never

have dared to hope," he said, "that you knew me so well already."

"You are forgetting your story," she reminded him.

He moved to the opposite side of the room, where there were fewest impediments in the shape of furniture. With his head down, and his hands crossed behind him he paced to and fro. Habit made him express himself in his usual quaint way —but he became embarrassed as he went on. Was he disturbed by his recollections? or by the fear of taking Emily into his confidence too freely?

"Different people have different ways of telling a story," he said. "Mine is the methodical way—I begin at the beginning. We will start, if you please, in the railway—we will proceed in a one-horse chaise—and we will stop at a village, situated in a hole. It was the nearest place to Sir

Jervis's house, and it was therefore my destination. I picked out the biggest of the cottages—I mean the huts—and asked the woman at the door if she had a bed to let. She evidently thought me either mad or drunk. I wasted no time in persuasion; the right person to plead my cause was asleep in her arms. I began by admiring the baby; and I ended by taking the baby's portrait. From that moment I became a member of the family—the member who had his own way. Besides the room occupied by the husband and wife, there was a sort of kennel in which the husband's brother slept. He was dismissed (with five shillings of mine to comfort him) to find shelter somewhere else; and I was promoted to the vacant place. It is my misfortune to be tall. When I went to bed, I slept with my head on the pillow, and my feet out of the

window. Very cool and pleasant in summer weather. The next morning, I set my trap for Sir Jervis."

"Your trap?" Emily repeated, wondering what he meant.

"I went out to sketch from Nature," Alban continued. "Can anybody (with or without a title—I don't care), living in a lonely country house, see a stranger hard at work with a colour box and brushes, and not stop to look at what he is doing? Three days passed, and nothing happened. I was quite patient; the grand open country all round me offered lessons of inestimable value in what we call aerial perspective. On the fourth day, I was absorbed over the hardest of all hard tasks in landscape art, studying the clouds straight from Nature. The magnificent moorland silence was suddenly profaned by a man's voice, speaking (or rather croaking) behind me.

'The worst curse of human life,' the voice said, 'is the detestable necessity of taking exercise. I hate losing my time; I hate fine scenery; I hate fresh air; I hate a pony. Go on, you brute!' Being too deeply engaged with the clouds to look round, I had supposed this pretty speech to be addressed to some second person. Nothing of the sort; the croaking voice had a habit of speaking to itself. In a minute more, there came within my range of view a solitary old man, mounted on a rough pony."

"Was it Sir Jervis?"

Alban hesitated.

"It looked more like the popular notion of the devil," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Morris!"

"I give you my first impression, Miss Emily, for what it is worth. He had his high-peaked hat in his hand, to keep his head cool. His wiry iron-grey hair looked

like hair standing on end; his bushy eyebrows curled upwards towards his narrow temples; his horrid old globular eyes stared with a wicked brightness; his pointed beard hid his chin; he was covered from his throat to his ankles in a loose black garment, something between a coat and a cloak; and, to complete him, he had a club foot. I don't doubt that Sir Jervis Redwood is the earthly alias which he finds convenient—but I stick to that first impression which appeared to surprise you. 'Ha! an artist; you seem to be the sort of man I want!' In those terms he introduced himself. Observe, if you please, that my trap caught him the moment he came my way. Who wouldn't be an artist?"

"Did he take a liking to you?" Emily inquired.

"Not he! I don't believe he ever took a liking to anybody in his life."

"Then how did you get your invitation to his house?"

"That's the amusing part of it, Miss Emily. Give me a little breathing time, and you shall hear."

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